



*"The highest mountains are the abode of the lions;
In the deepest waters the dragons dwell."*

Lions Gate Buddhist Priory

NEWSLETTER

January 2017

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Lions Gate Buddhist Priory is a branch of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives (OBC). Our practice is Serene Reflection Meditation (Sōtō Zen) and emphasizes basic Buddhist meditation and the keeping of the Precepts within the training of everyday life.

Rev. Kōten Benson, the Prior since 1986, is a Dharma Heir of Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett, founder of the OBC, who died in 1996. He was ordained in 1978 by Rev. Master Jiyu, and recognized by her as a Buddhist Master in 1983.

The Priory has three monks in residence and is located at Dragon Flower Mountain, one hundred and sixty acres of land in the Botanie Valley, near the village of Lytton in the B.C. interior. The land is off-grid and conditions are primitive as we strive to plant a mandala of Buddhist training in the mountains. There are regular retreats; visitors and guests are always welcome. Lay members and friends of the Priory meet regularly in Vancouver and Lytton, B.C. and there is a meditation group in Edmonton, Alberta.

The Priory is a registered charitable society supported entirely by donations from members and friends.

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An Affirming Flame

By Rev. Master Kōten Benson

The following is a transcript of a Dharma Talk that was offered to the Community by Rev. Master Kōten in December 2016. It has been lightly edited.

Homage to the Buddha.

Homage to the Dharma.

Homage to the Sangha.

When it seems like "things fall apart, the centre does not hold, mere anarchy is loosed upon the world," it is important for those who know how to be still, even if just a little, to "show an affirming flame," because the validity of their practice is tested by the insanity that descends upon a country from time to time.

Although Buddhism has been taught very widely in the United States over the past 150 years, a lot of what is taught is pablum, which is ineffective in actual times of crisis, for it cannot stand up to reality. All soothing platitudes -- and telling people to dwell in the present moment or to breathe -- fall apart in the face of spreading selfishness. Showing an affirming flame is to remain centred in one's practice and in the Precepts, while knowing and understanding that one's fundamental understanding of what this means is about to be challenged severely.

Remember that there is a "before" and an "after." It is very important to remember this. There was a "before" and there will be an "after." There will be a time when the mountain stops shaking. Sometimes, when the mountain shakes, and the sea withdraws, there is quiet for a moment, and then the sea rushes back in.

I personally cannot see any good coming out of the direction that the United States just took. Sometimes we stumble into harm due to our delusion and confusion; and sometimes we choose to undertake a course of action with our eyes open but not caring what the results will be. When that is done, there is no control over the consequences. One must not set in motion the wheel of karma for other beings, because it becomes and is beyond our recall. Crystallised selfishness, lies, doubt and despair have consequences.

At such a time, the insights developed from training, meditation and Precepts can start to take on an aura of unreality. It is hard to hear the interior voice sometimes when there is screaming going on in the background. This is also partly because the knowledge of the Unborn and of stillness is

of an entirely different type than the usual knowledge and information that we receive in the course of our daily lives.

Reverend Master Jiyu once said to me, "This world is upside down. People drown puppies and kittens that they cannot create, and yet they pay hundreds of dollars for battered old tin trays in antique stores." Sometimes it seems as though the world is not only upside down, but that it takes another somersault. It is essential to turn within and find the concreteness of stillness, to allow it to permeate our lives.

We are human beings living where we are living, and that we cannot escape. We will not be able to remain isolated. I've said many times that people think hatred and selfishness are real, and that compassion and gentleness are unrealistic and an illusion, but in fact it is the other way around. The Buddha said, "If people understood truly as I do the merits of giving, they would share their last crust of bread."

Training, in the eyes of the world, often resembles "walking in the sky." However, to truly "walk in the sky" means to give without reward, to let go of attachments and to try to live letting go of them, to not pursue fame and gain.

"If I am not for myself, then who will be for me?" That was said by Rabbi Hillel around the time of Christ, and it often gets quoted. But that is only the shallowest part of it. He also said, "If I am for myself alone, what am I? If not now, when? If not me, who? If not with others, then how?"

Remember that one's experience of stillness and of Precepts is real, that the law of karma is real, that to help others is a law of the universe. Particularly, do not be afraid of your neighbours or afraid of the other, and do not sink to the lowest common denominator.

It is particularly important for monastics not to drink the wine of "thinking in an ordinary fashion," for when that happens one ends up like those monks in Sri Lanka and Burma who generate hatred against other communities in their countries. This is due to what in Zen is called "following the crowd," buying and selling the wine of delusion, and believing in the existence of one's own selfishness. Monks are supposed to step beyond the clouds and mists of the world, or else what use are we at all if, as monastics, we drag our minds down into the ordinary filth that passes for wisdom in the world?

"As long as bowing continues, Buddhism continues." To cease from evil, to do good, to purify our hearts: this is the teaching of all the Buddhas.

Homage to all the Buddhas in all worlds.

Homage to all the Bodhisattvas in all worlds.
Homage to the Scripture of Great Wisdom.

NEWS

After a number of successful retreats here in 2016, we held our final one of the year on the first weekend of November. This coincided with a memorial service on Sunday, November 6 which marked the 20th Anniversary of the death of Rev. Master Jiyu, first Abbess of Shasta Abbey and Founder of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives. Twelve people attended the ceremony and expressed their gratitude for her life of teaching and training.

In early October we were visited by Gerry Blonski and his family. Gerry has a successful architectural practice in the Lower Mainland, and he has agreed to design some buildings for our Priory at a very reasonable cost. The planning is in its very early stages, and we will keep people posted as things progress.

We have had a number of visitors and lay residents over the fall and into the winter, and with their help we've been able to work on some much-needed projects. Our guests have built a large woodshed and have spent many days gathering, chopping and storing firewood to put in it. Other projects include building a small protective shed for the generators, rebuilding the front deck at Bodhidharma Hall, improving the drainage system, and general cleaning and landscaping in and around Bodhidharma Hall. We're very grateful to Andrew, John and others for all their hard work.

On Saturday, October 22, Rev. Master Koten, along with lay ministers Michele Feist and Meredith Midtdal, participated in an Interfaith conference, organised by the Vancouver Multifaith Action Society and hosted by the Church of Latter Day Saints in Surrey. The theme of the conference was "Reflecting on Love and Compassion." The conference was well attended, and representatives from ten different faith traditions spoke and answered questions.

Rev. Master Koten visited the Edmonton Buddhist Meditation Group for two weeks in early November. During his stay he offered Dharma Talks, a retreat, and private spiritual counselling to the group members. He is grateful for all the kind offerings of food and accommodations while there.

Our first big snowfall came just a few days before the beginning of our week-long monastic retreat (Rohatsu), celebrating Shakyamuni Buddha's enlightenment. We were very grateful to have this period in the silence of early winter to go deeply within and reflect. The retreat ended with the Buddha's Enlightenment Ceremony.

We were honoured to be invited by the Lytton First Nation (LFN) to their annual Elders' Luncheon in December at the Memorial Hall on the LFN reserve in Lytton. About 300 people

attended, and we were served a wonderful meal by grade 12 students from Kumsheen School. We were also given many lovely gifts.

We held a meditation vigil on New Year's Eve, followed by the New Year's Eve ceremony during which we gave thanks to the blessings of the old year and toasted in the new one. Afterwards we enjoyed snacks and treats and rang the big bell 108 times.

In the early hours of Sunday, December 8, our friend and companion Simhananda Cat died peacefully at the age of 17 years. She had a long and often difficult life, having lost her left leg in an accident eight years ago. We held a funeral service for her later that day. We will miss her.

IN GRATITUDE

The Priory and its community are entirely supported by the kind donations of its members and friends, and we are grateful for everything that we receive. Some of the donations that we have received over the past few months have included the following:

Butter; yogurt; peanut butter; fresh fruits and vegetables; nuts and seeds; eggs; milk; pizza; crackers; cheese; chocolates; caramels; cookies; fruit cakes; stöllen; tofu; raisins; toffee; quinoa; potato starch; coffees; salt; juices; soft drinks; cakes; pies; breads; jams, jellies and preserves; candies; herbs; mustard; maple butter; chutney; restaurant meals; soaps; lotions and salves; a measuring tape; a basket; several boxes of kindling; recipe books; quartz crystal piece; blank books; iPad cover; books; zabutons; zafus; meditation benches; a coffee maker; doggie tooth-brushes; measuring spoons; a jar; glucosamine; bath mats; a floor mat; candles; wind chimes; a knife; paper clips; a rice paddle; artificial flowers; Dharma tapes; a carrying bag; calendars; a suitcase; salmon and treats for the dogs and cats. Thank you to Linda and Tom, and to Bob and Patti, for all the delicious lunches they have offered on Sundays; to everyone who has given us accommodations and food when we travel; to Victor for offering a place to meet on Sundays; and to everyone who through their offerings of selfless training and merit have been of benefit to this place and to all beings.

OFFERING BOWL



The Priory could use the following:

A carpenter's square (approximately 1 1/2 ft)

Dish soap (preferably unscented)

Canned baked beans

Other canned beans (black, Romano, chickpeas, etc)

Cleaning rags and cloths

AA and AAA batteries

We are always grateful for donations of food items. Our needs are always changing; please contact us if you'd like to bring something.

We are entirely supported by the kind donations of friends and members, receiving no outside help from government agencies or other monasteries. Monetary donations are always gratefully accepted.

-In gassho

SCHEDULE & UPCOMING RETREATS



The congregation of Lions Gate Buddhist Priory is meeting regularly in Vancouver; and in Lytton the monks are offering meditation each Thursday evening at the Two Rivers Studio at 366 Main Street in Lytton. Meditation instruction for beginners will start at 6:00pm followed by meditation and walking meditation at 6:30. Tea will follow. No previous experience is necessary. All are welcome. In Lytton there is also a ceremony on Sundays at 2625 Botanie Creek Road, starting at 10 am. For further information or to arrange for meditation instruction please contact lionsgatebuddhistpriory@lyttonbc.net

A meditation group of the OBC is located in Edmonton, Alberta. For information please contact:

EDMONTON BUDDHIST MEDITATION GROUP
10825 – 80 AVENUE
EDMONTON, AB T6E 1V9

WEB: www.serenereflection.org PHONE: (780) 433-3088

Shasta Abbey

February 10-12	Introductory Retreat
February 15-17	Silent Meditation Retreat
March 3-5	Stillness in Activity; Activity in Stillness Retreat
March 8-10	Silent Meditation Retreat
March 19-26	Jukai: The Ten Precepts Retreat

Shasta Abbey also offers resident lay training throughout most of the year, under arrangement with their Guestmaster. Please contact the Guestmaster if you are interested in this option.

For more information please contact:

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