



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

Lions Gate Buddhist Priory

NEWSLETTER

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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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ARTICLE

Five Diamond Points: The First Point

Rev. Master Kōten Benson

The following is a transcription of a Dharma Talk that was recently offered to the community at Lions Gate by Rev. Master Kōten. It is the second in a series on “The Five Diamond Points That Penetrate to the Very Heart of the Matter.” Transcribed by Rev. Aurelian with very minor revisions made for ease of reading.

Homage to the Buddha.
Homage to the Dharma.
Homage to the Sangha.

The Five Diamond Points that penetrate to the very heart of the matter: the soft and flexible mind; the making use of the will to turn the wheel; faith; meditation; and actual experience and realisation of the Unborn.

When Dogen returned from China, he was asked what he brought back with him, and he said, “A soft and flexible mind.” In the instructions of the Third Chinese Ancestor, she says, “Only cease to cherish opinions.” Keizan Zenji says, “Erudition disturbs enlightenment.” And we are urged to observe the Dharma with the naive mind of a child. We all have views and opinions about the world. What is being referred to is using those ideas and opinions in order to understand the foundation of reality. The Truth cannot be grasped in that way. Why? Because it is not our selves.

As Dogen has pointed out, training is not about perfecting the self. “To study the Dharma is to study the self. To study the self is to let go of the self.” Why is this? Because what we call our “selves” is transitory, impermanent, passing away; a warp and woof of threads in a carpet that come together; a coalescing of clouds that come together for a brief time. Many people try to understand this by thinking of a philosophical view of “no separate self,” etc, etc. These are not actually helpful in terms of Buddhist training. One way of looking at it is, instead of talking about “no separate self,” to talk about selfishness. Many people, when hearing the term “no separate self” think it has something to do with interconnectedness with other things; but, if this is not understood, then it is simply an expansion of the ego into the broader world and only serves to crystallise selfishness and the imposition of our views and opinions on other people and on the world in general.

It cannot be too strongly emphasised that if we do not do something about ourselves then our patterns will continue. And if we do not attempt it now, when will we attempt it? And, as Tendo Nyojo summarised the whole of the way in his private instructions to Dogen: “Do not think that

it is easy.” It is not complicated; it does not require a quick and complicated mind. It is why this tradition is called “Farmer’s Zen.” Because it is not about complicating.

To grasp the will and turn the wheel requires effort. We eventually learn what “effort” means, but we cannot learn what it means without applying the effort. This also means to look up when we wish to look down.

Faith, the third of the Diamond Points, is to proceed, without knowing for sure, but not to let the “not knowing for sure” stop one. It is also about not having a critical mind towards the Dharma. Having an investigative mind, a plunging mind, a mind willing to go deeply, deeply into it is important.

The story of the coal, the fire, is very applicable here. The master and disciple were sitting. There was incense on the altar. The disciple asked, “Why did Bodhidharma come from the West?” People often make an incredibly stupid assumption that these people are talking in some sort of mysterious language which, as Dogen points out, they are not. They are quite clear about what they mean to one another. To ask, “Why did Bodhidharma come from the West?” is to ask what everybody knew the answer was. Bodhidharma came from the West to seek a suitable companion to train in the Dharma with. Everybody would have known that. What they are asking is, “Am I such a person? Am I a person of the Way? Am I a person who can understand?” That is the meaning of the saying “Why did Bodhidharma come from the West?” And then all the answers point through the disciple. They have no other meaning than that. But, as Dogen says, do not think that they were engaged in some sort of mysterious wordplay. It makes them look like fools.

In response to the disciple’s question, the master said, “Put some more incense on the charcoal.” Both would have understood the ordinary meaning of this, which is doing the next thing in training with a reverential mind. But in order to do that in those days, they had to get a piece of coal from the fire pit. It could also have been that the coal was in the incense burner, but it actually seems to be more that it was in the fire, the fire grate. And so, the disciple poked desultorily into the ash and said that there was no coal left, no ember. And the master got down from their seat, took the poker, poked to the very heart of the ash and found an ember and held it up and said, “What do you think this is?” At that moment the disciple awakened to the connection between the Teaching and their own daily life and went and bowed to the master and thanked them. And the master replied, “Fortunately it has nothing to do with me.” And this is the nub, the core, of the story. You cannot carry yourself through the gate.

The fourth diamond Point is pure meditation. “The means of training are thousandfold.” There are all sorts of means of training in the Dharma that can help us and be beneficial to us, and we should not disparage them, and they are different for each of the different traditions. But. (Reverend Master Jiyu used to say, “Be very careful with your “buts” and “ands.” Many people took this rather foolishly to mean to never use the term “but.” “But” is used to make a distinction). The means of training are thousandfold. Pure meditation must be done.

Although it is true that the Dharma is everywhere, if you do not practice you will not understand it. As it says in the secret teaching, “The Light of the Lord is everywhere. The palace of the Buddha Nature is within. They desire to go quickly so that their happy union may be soon.” “There is awakening to the Truth, but we have to do the practice that actualises it for us. There is peace and joy forever, but we have to do the training or else we will not experience it.” These are the words of Bodhidharma.

The Fifth Diamond Point penetrating to the centre is experience of the Unborn. Not talking about the Unborn, not speculating about the Unborn. Experience of the Unborn. Shakyamuni says, in his great statement of Dharma Transmission, “O monks, there is an unborn, uncreated, unformed, undying. If it were not so, then there would be no liberation.” And we would be trapped. We would be trapped with our selves forever, with no possibility of change, no possibility of transformation. But, because there is an unborn, uncreated, undying, then there is the actual realisation, experience, dissolving into, making ourselves one with this.

It is not a theory, it is not a game. It is in deadly earnest. It is the sole purpose of our existence. It is the sole medicine for the curing of all ills. It is the sole basis of true peace.

In the story, the master is asked, again, some version of “Why did Bodhidharma come from the West?” And the master says, “The entire universe is one bright pearl.” And the disciple says, “Don’t speak symbolically.” And the master says, “I am not speaking symbolically. The entire universe is one bright pearl.”

You are not far from it. And yet, you must exhaust your ordinary efforts to encounter it. To leap beyond all fear, to change the ordinary understanding, to encounter with naive mind. Then, as Dogen says, “Buddha does all, and we follow and live in that doing.”

Before us, in front of us, enveloping us, we have the possibility of encountering it. As monks, we vow that that will be our sole focus. When we receive the mat, we say, “It will forever guide my robes.” Which means, of course, that we will forever bow.

The Five Diamond Points can be seen as laid one after another along the road towards the centre, or arranged in a circle, each one pointing to the centre in its way. In order to understand this, you have to grasp and penetrate all the way to the centre. Then you will know less than you know now, and encounter...

NEWS

In early September we moved the statue of Kwan Yin up to Fearlessness Peak. The statue is 5 metres (16.4 ft) tall and weighs 10 metric tons (22,000 lbs). The Kwan Yin is very beautiful, holding a vase containing the waters of compassion in her left hand, and making a blessing mudra with her right.

This move was the culmination of much effort by many people. The statue was offered to us four years ago by Tu Viên Chan Nguyen, a Vietnamese monastery in Langley BC near Vancouver. When the Abbot, Venerable Thich Viên Giac, visited our property with his community of male and female monks, he wanted us to have a large Kwan Yin statue to look out and bless the valley and the town of Lytton.

Before we moved the statue, it was necessary to have our driveway improved, which meant getting a water truck and grader here. The next step was to get a sturdy concrete base constructed. Before the crew started digging the hole in which the base was to be placed, we contacted Lytton First Nations, and they sent up a representative to look for any indigenous artefacts that might possibly be unearthed. None were found, but the representative said it was a likely place for them, as Fearlessness Peak looks like the type of place that someone might have chosen in the past while on a Vision Quest, which was a spiritual journey undertaken by adolescents as a rite of passage.

After the hole was dug, the crew built forms and poured concrete for a 6' x 6' base, one ft thick, on top of which they poured a column, 4' x 4' and 8' tall. Then they backfilled the hole and spread a layer of gravel around the base.

A few weeks later on September 5, after the concrete had a chance to cure, the actual move took place. This was a major operation that took two days. A mobile crane was required at both ends of the move.

The statue spent the night on the truck outside the Lytton Hotel, eliciting much curiosity from the townspeople. Early the next morning Kwan Yin arrived at Lions Gate. The truck had no problem getting up our steep road, but the crane got stuck halfway around the first switchback and we needed to tow it. Before the statue was placed, Rev. Master Koten inscribed a large Sanskrit OM seed syllable on its base as a blessing. Standing on a small rise on top of Fearlessness Peak, the statue looks quite magnificent, facing south towards the village of Lytton and the Fraser Canyon beyond, blessing the world.

We are grateful to the community of Tu Viên Chan Nguyen; to everyone from Lillooet Contracting, Wingenback Industrial Movers, and VSA Highway Maintenance; and to all the many people who donated the funds, encouragement and support necessary to bring Kwan Yin to Dragonflower Mountain. We warmly invite anyone who wishes to come and see her.



We had a hot, dry summer here on the mountain, which allowed us to work on some other projects. Andrew finished the new deck on the east side of Bodhidharma Hall with steps leading down from the north end to the outhouse. John planted a successful vegetable garden, with tomatoes, potatoes, beans, radishes, cucumbers, squash, peas, and herbs. This is the first vegetable garden we've planted up here. In September several of us insulated and winterised Prajnatarā Hall, our "log cabin zendo," which we hope will enable us to use the meditation hall through the winter. As well we have been busy gathering and splitting firewood, and John has been clearing underbrush from around Bodhidharma Hall, which is important for fire prevention. We replaced the propane fittings on our hot water heater, and installed a propane heater in Raven Cottage, making that tiny dwelling useable all year round.

Our 34-year-old Dodge truck, which we have been using to plow snow and haul wood, finally "died" this past winter. We were able to purchase a newer, more reliable truck to replace it. It's a 3/4 ton Dodge Ram Diesel with a lot of power, and in excellent condition. It is also driveable on public roads, which our previous truck was not. We are hoping that it will serve us well for many years.

In September Rev. Master Kōten and Rev. Master Aurelian travelled to Shasta Abbey in California to attend a Conclave of our Order. Conclaves, usually held every six years, are important meetings of the senior monks of the Order held to discuss rules and other business. We are very grateful to the community of Shasta Abbey for hosting this event; to Rev. Leon, Prior of Portland Buddhist Priory, who helped expedite our accommodation and travel enroute to the Abbey; to all the monks who came from North America and Europe; and to everyone who helped make this event possible so that we could renew old spiritual bonds and forge new ones.

We were happy to host several retreats over the spring, summer and autumn. Although with winter approaching we end our scheduled retreats for the year, we always welcome guests who would like to visit for any length of time, whether it's just for a cup of tea or a long retreat. Please contact us if you would like to visit.

We continue to hold weekly meditation meetings on Tuesday nights at 6:00 pm at the Chinese History Museum (Joss House) in Lytton. As well, the Vancouver congregation meets on the last Sunday of the month at the residence of Supriti Bhārma. Please contact us for details.

IN GRATITUDE

The Priory is entirely supported by the generous donations and gifts from members and friends. We receive no funding from any government or other agencies. We are deeply grateful for all that we receive. In addition to monetary donations, we are grateful for the following, which we have received over the past few months: savoury sauces, squash purée, jams, fresh fruits and vegetables, chocolate creamer, olive oil, granola, potato mix, chocolates, yogurt, cream, chocolate wafers, various types of nuts, almond-berry mix, cheeses, lentils, dahl beans,

subji, crackers, spices, pastries, samosas, muffins, canned vegetables, canned soups, canned beans and legumes, flour, sugar, juices, Kraft Dinner, dried cereals, peanut butter, nut and fruit bars, soft drinks, cheeses, various candies, butter tarts, falafel mix, pickles, evaporated milk, dried beans, granola bars, pasta, dried mushrooms, honey, hot sauce, tofu, teas, vegetable broth, mayonnaise, pancake mix, olives, coffee, sun dried tomatoes, brownie mix, biscuits, raisins, breads, butter, noodles, tempeh, figs, cookies, prepared meals and restaurant meals, two spatulas, dog and cat food including canned salmon, a dog toy for Bobi, grape and apricot seedlings, incense, a shoehorn, insulation for Prajnatarā Hall, toilet paper, paper towels, medicine for monks, and two soldering irons.

Thank you to everyone who provided meals, accommodation, and transportation for traveling monks, and to everyone who has helped us in countless ways through their generous offerings of time, money, labour, and selfless spiritual training.

OFFERING BOWL

We could make use of the following:

Cold FX and vitamin D

Heavy duty rubber cleaning gloves (for cleaning stoves, etc)

A stove-top pressure cooker (please contact us before purchasing)

Nuts and seeds

-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 Tuesday evening at the Chinese History Museum at 145 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

November 10-12	Introductory Retreat
November 15-17	Silent Meditation Retreat
Dec 29-Jan 1st	New Year Celebratory Retreat
February 9-11	Introductory 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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