



*"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

The Five Diamond Points: The Second Point

Rev. Master Koten Benson

The following is a transcription of a Dharma Talk that was recently offered to the community at Lions Gate by Rev. Master Koten. It is the third in a series on “The Five Diamond Points That Penetrate to the Very Heart of the Matter.” Transcribed by Michele Feist, with 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 use of the will; faith; meditation; and experience of the Unborn.

The second vajra point is the use of the will in order to arrive at willingness.

Imagine, if you will, a wheel. The centre is at the heart and the upper rim is at the crown of the head and the lower rim is at the pelvis. And think of it as a water wheel. And that contained within each of the sections is a bucket; the type of water wheel that was used to carry water from a river or source of water up to a higher level of land where it could be used to water crops and plants. Teresa of Avila does this in great detail in “The Four Degrees of Prayer.”

Think, if you will, of a vajra, free to swing around, with its centre located at the heart, going up the back and down the front.

To make use of the will, particularly in the beginning, requires a tremendous amount of effort. To turn ourselves away from our habitual patterns of thought and away from our karmic propensities towards practicing something better.

When we take the Precepts — and the three types of Precepts which, when we receive them as lay people and as monks, we call the Three Pure Precepts, or the Three Cumulative Precepts — we are actually taking all of the Precepts under these three types of Precepts. They are the Precepts which tell us what not to do, the Precepts which advise us what to do, and the Bodhisattva Precepts, which bring compassion for ourselves and others into the mix. It is the compassion that informs and penetrates the other Precepts and helps us to know how to apply them.

When we do this initially, it is as hard an effort as dragging a bucket of water from a low place up to a high place. Although willingness is talked about, it is also truly necessary to understand the use of the will in order to come to the point of willingness. Like so much else in training in the beginning, it is very hard and difficult to undergo; and a great deal of effort, much of it misplaced, is needed. By “misplaced,” I mean we have to apply the will in order to understand how the will functions in training. We have to make the mistakes, the excesses and the holdings back, in order to understand how this functions and in what way the will becomes harnessed first and then becomes part of the flow of the Buddha Mind.

The Zen tradition in particular places a lot of focus on the will and effort. Particularly coming out of the Japanese tradition where this is a particular emphasis of the culture, partly for various reasons, partly because it is an island and island cultures tend to emphasize a whole lot of rules regarding self-control in order to live in confined space with other people. But in any case, when people are trained within the Japanese Zen tradition a lot of emphasis is put upon self-control, focus, and the minute learning of detail.

When we are trained as novices, we learn how to unfold the kesa, in what order things go back in the kesa case, that is, the kesa, the rakhusu, the mat, all the minutiae of how to move. This is the way Zen has been transmitted into the west, although westerners function differently. Our culture functions differently in terms of the meaning of form. In western culture, particularly American, the idea that going through a form is in and of itself sincere strikes people as duplicitous, but that is the basis of Japanese cultural views.

Now, in terms of using the will, sometimes I have described it as “going somewhere that you don’t want to go, doing something that you don’t want to do, and helping somebody you don’t want to help,” this being the essence of being an adult, both in a regular sense as a member of society and in a spiritual sense.

When we are trained in the beginning, particularly as monastics, we surrender to the schedule. We surrender to “the bell rings and we put on the kesa.” And this way of going about training is intensely helpful if we can truly interiorize it, for then we will always do that which needs to be done, because it is important early in training to develop the habit of willingness.

The habit of willingness often has to push against the inertia of not wanting to move, when we encounter spiritual stodginess in ourselves, that is, when the will seems paralyzed, or weighed down. Sometimes, this is experienced by some people as a feeling of leadiness near the kidneys, near the back, which in Asian systems is where the will is located. And sometimes, when you are sitting, it is helpful to grasp the will; to literally gather all one’s resources at the base of the spine and deliberately bring it up until it reaches the crown of the head, then let it go and flow down. When it says in the Soto tradition that training is a matter of both body and mind this has many, many layers of meaning. Many people think of it as being related to minute etiquette of daily life, but in fact it also involves the changes and processes that occur within body and mind. The two Scriptures Sandokai and The Most Excellent Mirror: Samadhi lay out in detail the various changes that happen in our bodies and minds throughout the period of training, throughout our lives, so that we may become aware of them and not alarmed by them.

Coming from the first Diamond Point into the second Diamond Point, which I am doing: part of the first one is sincerity of mind. Sincerity of mind is a lack of facetiousness, cynicism and judgmental mind. For as it says in Zazen Rules, this cannot be understood by the opinionated mind. This cannot be understood by the judgmental mind. This cannot be understood by the mind of picking and choosing. So, this penetrates into the correct use of the will in training. This is what makes the use of the will in training different from the use of the will to achieve selfish objectives. It is this sincerity of mind. Rev. Master Jiyu used to emphasize that, in being a monk, it is essential to put aside facetious or judgmental mind. Otherwise, at a later date one will cause enormous trouble for oneself and other people, particularly when doing things like funerals.

A sincere mind of this type is generally contrary to what is called the way of the world. One reason for people renouncing the world and embracing monastic life is in order to practice this sincerity without fear of it making oneself vulnerable, sincerity sometimes being very difficult to practice within the context of having a job where there are many cynical people.

The Second Diamond Point of the use of the will in this way also emphasizes the fact that training is something that we ourselves do individually. There is a saying that one can coast along for years in a monastery on the training of other people. And, at the same time, training with others particularly in this tradition, is considered essential.

Keizan emphasizes that all the great masters trained with others, they trained within the context of training with other people; and that when we hear the stories of people living on their own on mountains, he greatly emphasized that this was done only after they have been training themselves in a community for a long period of time. This includes somebody like Ryokan, who trained thoroughly in a monastery, was an expert in Dharma, gave expert Dharma talks, was an expert in the Avatamsaka Scripture, and was actually quite well-versed in community life. In Japan there is a tendency to admire the eccentric, and when that gets transferred to the West we miss the context. And so Ryokan from time to time gave talks on the Avatamsaka Scripture, for which he was well known. He also trained disciples (which again is not necessarily obvious from the modern books) and had a number of them, including one who became abbot, I believe, of a Shingon temple.

In each culture and the transmission from one to the other, one of the main difficulties is context, for without it there is the tendency to shift the people and the circumstances into our own context, without understanding why and what these people were doing.

And also a tendency to worship the exotic. These people were not exotic. They weren't speaking a strange language of symbols, they were very much like ourselves. They ran into the same difficulties of family, job, external things, politics, the state of the nation. And they were desperate enough to want to do something about themselves more than they wanted to reform the world or other people. They wanted to and succeeded in plunging deeply within themselves, excavating themselves.

It is like an old well filled up with dirt. The structure of the well is sound. We have to excavate it, to dig it out. There is water at the very bottom, but its presence does not do us much good until we excavate it out, then the water can come bubbling to the surface. It can quench our thirst and the thirst of others. Whenever dirt falls into the well, we have to clean it out, knowing, as Keizan says, that “perfection,” in the way that the mind envisions it, is impossible.

“We are such stuff as dreams are made of. And our little life is rounded with the sleep.” We are like the gathering of fog on the mountain which looks solid and moves about, gets caught amongst the trees. And when the sun comes or a wind, it disperses and it is gone. We are like this.

So, having too much self-importance is a waste of time. Everything we need is spread out in front of us, everything we need to train ourselves. We have our bodies, which as we grow older, start falling apart. We are born, the skin and flesh, organs are new. They grow in that newness to their peak — partly, from the perspective of nature, so that we can have children and continue the life of human beings.

And then once it reaches the peak it starts to wear out, as those of us of any appreciable age know. A lot of things that one reads about in books and that were theory one experiences for oneself. One can't see as well, one can't hear as well, one can't walk as well. It is important to develop the use of the will when one is young so that it can continue as the body breaks down. The body breaking down is terrifying to the constituents of body and mind, because the body and mind fear loss, fear extinction. But we need not do so. We can train ourselves, and we can arrive at the place of peace, where each reminder of impermanence is welcomed with acceptance.

We are such stuff as dreams are made of. And the dissolving of our little life can be the dew drop's entry into the shining sea.

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

NEWS

The autumn was pleasant here on the mountain, and in December, winter set in with a significant amount of snow. We are really grateful to everyone who responded so quickly and generously to our appeal for funds to purchase a new snowplow. Paired with our truck, we have been able to keep our driveway clear and passable. This is a big help to us and eases our mind greatly, as snow clearing has been a formidable challenge over the years.

We also have accomplished a number of other projects. Andrew kindly built steps off of the end of the new deck he built last summer. This really helps when we have to use the outhouse, especially in the winter. John cleared brush and undergrowth from around Bodhidharma Hall, something we have been wanting to do for years to help with fire suppression. We installed a propane heater for Rev. Master Koten's room, which had a problem with being chronically chilly in the colder months. We also installed a meditation bell and drum in Prajnatarā Hall. The bell is used to call people to meditation and services, and we strike the drum at the end of the first meditation period in the morning before we recite the Kesa Verse, which is our vow to train another day for the benefit of all beings.

We welcomed a steady stream of visitors this autumn and winter. People have come from Edmonton, Vancouver and other parts of BC, Ontario, and the USA for day-visits and private retreats. We welcome guests at any time for long and short stays.

In October, we interred the ashes of Doris Liang at the base of the Kwan Yin statue. Doris was a Chinese-Canadian Buddhist who got to know Rev. Master Koten while she was dying in hospice, and it was her wish that the ashes be placed with the statue once it had been moved up here. Her family and friends were in attendance for the simple ceremony we did, and afterwards they donated a lovely meal which we all enjoyed at Bodhidharma Hall.

In November, Rev. Valeria traveled to Edmonton for ten days to visit the meditation group there. During this time she met with the group during their scheduled meditation meetings, held a meditation retreat, and was generally available for the congregation. We are grateful to everyone who made this visit possible and for all the assistance they gave.

We also continued to perform scheduled festival ceremonies this fall and winter, including Rev. Master Jiyu's Memorial, Remembrance Day, Buddha's Enlightenment, and the Maitreya Festival. On New Year's Eve, we held a meditation vigil at Prajnatarā Hall followed by the New Year's Eve Ceremony, during which Rev. Master Koten revolved the Scripture of Great Wisdom for the benefit of all beings. This is the first time we have held the ceremony at Prajnatarā Hall. Several people from the local congregation attended. Afterward we enjoyed a festive light meal at Bodhidharma Hall and rang the temple bell 108 times.

In early December we held our annual Rohatsu (Buddha's Enlightenment) monastic retreat, a seven-day retreat which commemorates the Enlightenment of Shakyamuni Buddha. This is an opportunity for the community to put aside all daily activity and spend seven days in quiet

meditation. The monks and lay community are grateful to everyone whose kind support of alms and training make this possible. We were delighted to welcome Rev. Chizen, a monk of the Soto Zen tradition whose Master lives in Poland, to join us for this week.

In what has become an annual tradition, we hosted a Christmas morning brunch again this year. We were happy to welcome neighbours from the farm below us (Sointula Greens) as well as several of the local congregation to Bodhidharma Hall for a lot of really good food and joyful conversation.

WITH GRATITUDE

The Priory, its community, and its activities are entirely supported by the generous donations of congregation members and friends. We receive no outside funding from government agencies or the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives. We are very grateful for everything that we receive.

Over the past months, in addition to monetary donations we received the following: pastries, pineapple, mango, tortilla chips, salsa, granola, corn meal, pie, kale, peppers, mushrooms, breads, milk, potatoes, coconut milk, cheeses, chocolate, coffee, tamarind, herbs and spices, samosas, potato pancakes, yogurt, radishes, oranges, corn chips, salad, seeds and nuts, coconut flour, rice, lychee fruits, tofu, raisins, pickles, sauces, cakes, sauerkraut, teas, durian, Christmas puddings, bean curd rolls, dumplings, spring rolls, cookies, apples, cabbage, apple sauce, canned fruit, lentil soup, cucumbers, tomatoes, carrots, celery, veggie hot dogs, candy, pasta, eggs, honey, chutney, butter, hot chocolate, sour cream, noodles, spanakopita, bananas, Cloud fungus, coconut cream, canned vegetables, kale chips, papadums, chapatis, garbanzo bean flour, sugar, medicinal herbs, lentils, whole wheat flour, a greenhouse system, razor blades, mats, a manual food processor, coffee filters, a butter dish, a journal, batteries, casserole heat guard, incense, pruning saw, a CD, book, hand warmers, flashlights, clothing for the community, rechargeable drills, drill bit set, dowels, shoes, prayer flags, a small Buddha statue, chopsticks, a pressure cooker, salves and soaps, canning jars, dog biscuits, curtain panels. Thank you to everyone who supplied food and accommodation during our travels. And thank you to everyone who support us through your ongoing training and practice, the merit of which is incalculable.

OFFERING BOWL

The Priory could use the following:

- Hand soap (bar type, preferably non-scented)
- A vise (for carpentry and other uses)

-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 6:00 pm 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:

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10825 – 80 AVENUE
EDMONTON, AB T6E 1V9
WEB: www.serenereflection.org PHONE: (780) 433-3088

Shasta Abbey

February 20-22	Silent Meditation Retreat
March 2-4	Continuing Practice Retreat
March 14-16	Silent Meditation Retreat
March 25-April 1	Jukai: The Ten Precepts Retreat
April 13-15	Silent Meditation 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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