



*"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.

Article

How to Meditate: Part VII

Rev. Master Koten Benson

The following text is a transcription of the seventh and final part in a series of Dharma Talks offered by Rev. Master Koten to the community of Lions Gate Buddhist Priory in 2016. It was transcribed and edited by Tracy Kitagawa, Michele Feist, Pierre Kohl and Rev. Master Aurelian with minor revisions made for ease of reading.

Homage to the Buddha

Homage to the Dharma

Homage to the Sangha

Buddhism teaches that emptiness is simply empty of anything our minds can grasp and that this emptiness is the actual true nature of everything.

There is an old Japanese story of the Buddha trying to help somebody who was down in the deepest variety of, for lack of a better word we'll call hell, but in Buddhism it doesn't mean an eternal state. The Buddha

saw this person suffering horribly in the very darkest pit and wanted to help. Because this is the way karma works, he tried to find a kind deed, an unselfish act that this person had done. All the Buddha was able to find was that one day this person, who was a robber and a brigand, on returning home from having stolen and killed a lot of people, saw a spider in his path. The robber was about to stamp on this spider but refrained from doing so.

As a result of this kind deed a spider appeared in this hell realm, at the bottom of a very dark, dark hole. The spider spun a web, leaving a thread to dangle down, down, down, down, into the hole. And when the thief, for the lack of a better term, saw the spider web, he saw it as a way out.

So, he grabbed hold of the thread and began to climb. Bear in mind that the appearance of this spider web was a result of his creating good karma. The thief climbed up the spider's thread higher and higher. As he travelled further up he could see there was light up above. Then he looked down and saw that all the other beings who were there in the pit with him were watching what he was doing, and had begun to follow him up the spider thread. In great fear that the thread would break, the thief turned and shouted at them, "Get away, this is mine!"

and at the very word "mine" the spider thread snapped. The thread of his merit and karma could bear the weight of all beings but not the weight of his selfishness.

People often think that it is greed and selfishness that are the reality and that when people talk about compassion and kindness, they are being unrealistic. Bleeding hearts is sometimes the term used to refer to those who express, what seem to some, an unrealistic concern for other beings. What people don't realize is that it is compassion and unselfishness that are real. It is greed, hate and delusion that, from the viewpoint of the Unborn, are unreal.

Challenging karma is exemplified in a story of two First Nations who once were at war with one another in this area of British Columbia, long before contact with Europeans. One of the First Nations chiefs, named Splintlum, had a bridge named after him in the village of Lytton for his many deeds, including the following remarkable accomplishment.

Over time Chief Splintlum and his Lytton group had captured people from Mount Currie, people known as the Lillooet. The chief decided to end the conflict, so he travelled through his territory and beyond and purchased all the slaves belonging to the Lillooet nation. He then took

them back to the traditional area of dispute between the people of Lytton and the people of Mount Currie - the Stein Valley, where battles used to take place. Chief Splintlum entered the Stein and crossed through it until he encountered the Lillooet people on the other side. He then released their people to them, those who had been slaves to the Lytton people. They sat down and camped there together and made a formal peace, which continues to this day. This peace is commemorated at the entrance of the Stein Valley.

This is what is known as challenging karma. In the precepts commentary it says, "to do something by oneself without copying others is to become an example to the world."

In Buddhism, emptiness is a term used to mean that the nature of reality is, as Zazen Rules says, beyond personal opinions, beyond our grasping with the selfish mind.

Nagyaarajyuna says that the nature of this emptiness is compassion. The essential nature of emptiness is compassion. When people try to grasp the nature of reality or the nature of spiritual states with the selfish mind, they will not only not understand, but they will experience instead a sort of negative emptiness as a result. And people can end up

feeling frustrated because they will seek what Chögyam Trungpa calls "spiritual materialism." That is, they attempt to practice spiritual training for the sake of self-aggrandizement. They become like the hermit crab, who gathers up all sorts of shells belonging to other beings who have passed away, and decorates himself with them and hides inside of his accumulations. This is very much what people do.

This is because selfishness seems stable: because it's what we know, we are fearful of letting go, even for a moment. But compassion is the actual true nature of things. When we sit in meditation and let go, what is *it* that is there? The grasping mind cannot find anything there and therefore thinks that there is nothing there.

In the same way, when people reject the more primitive ideas of God they think that there is nothing there. And yet this nothing is filled with compassion. Because this is so, when we hear of a spontaneous act of kindness, or an act of courage, or when we hear of somebody acting unselfishly for the sake of others, we experience a lifting up of the heart. It is why societies give medals or rewards for such things. It is because these acts of compassion come very close to the Truth.

In the beginning we train, as Dogen says, for the sake of self - from what Rev. Master Jiyu called the "me side", which is reasonable enough. We start with the idea of finding peace of mind for ourselves or finding something for ourselves. Then we learn to train for the sake of others, and then eventually simply for the sake of training - to train for the sake of training which includes both self and others.

Compassion in meditation is of such importance that countless verses talk about it. The day in a monastery starts off with the recitation of Avalokiteshvara, the Great Compassionate One. In the middle of the *Scripture of Great Wisdom*, which is also recited every day, the Holy Lord Great Kanzeon Bosatsu is mentioned, and at the end of the day during Vespers, the *Litany of the Great Compassionate One* is recited. In the Theravada tradition there is the *Metta Sutra*, the Sutra of Loving Kindness, which is equally emphasized.

To train, letting go of selfishness, is the most important part of the meaning of training and meditation.

The Four Noble Truths point to a "belief in a separate self" as the root cause of suffering. I myself have found this problematical as a way of

putting it, because what does 'belief' mean, what does 'separate' mean and what does 'self' mean? Rather, one might say that the cause of suffering is selfishness, and it is the cause of suffering because selfishness is unreal.

We are very much like the mayflies that I described in the previous section.

"What weeds by the roadside will the dew of our life fall on?" The dew falls on the weeds by the roadside and evaporates in the morning sun and is gone. This is not simply to remind us that all is impermanent so we had better get a move on. It's much, much more than that. We can be convinced of impermanence but not necessarily get a move on to do good things. We also need to be reminded of the opportunity that we have, as human beings, to train ourselves.

Sometimes benefiting others is not the same thing as staying around them. Sometimes leaving the other person space is compassion.

There is something called the Bodhisattva Vows in Buddhism. Although they are repeated a lot in ceremonies, "However innumerable beings may be I vow to save them all..." or "We offer the merits of this ceremony to all so that they may be able to realize the truth..." etc., I

think of the Bodhisattva Vow as a commitment to go where the training will take me and to not set any limits upon that. I vow to go to where the path of training takes me. That is how I have ended up here on Dragon Flower Mountain. It was not a career choice but rather a trying to determine what was good to do. If I were to expend energy determining what I would like to do or what I would prefer to do, I might have done something quite different.

To make such a commitment, to go where the training takes one, is the reason why some people become monks - so that there is nothing that they are not putting into the pot, if I can put it that way. Monastic training is not superior or inferior to life as lay trainees. The comparison makes no sense. People who become monks are people who cannot be satisfied with ordinary answers or a stopping place, and when that is so one has to keep on going. If one is not troubled by such things don't worry about it. That's quite useless. It's more a question of being true to where the path takes you, rather than having a particular definition as to where it should take you.

It is foolish to think that all people are meant to be monks. For one thing this simply wouldn't work. It doesn't make any sense. Therefore, lay people worrying about whether or not they should become monks

is, to my mind, not useful at all. If you feel a pull that you cannot resist however, that is a different matter. If you don't feel the pull don't be concerned. There is nothing lacking. As I have said before, there have always been laity who trained themselves and attained the way.

Compassion is, as it were, always co-joined with True Wisdom and both are necessary and essential for understanding the Buddhist path. One could say, therefore, that Wisdom is Emptiness; Compassion is Fullness.

Homage to all the Buddhas in All Worlds

Homage to all the Bodhisattvas in All Worlds

Homage to the Scripture of Great Wisdom

News

October 2020

Although we have been officially closed to visitors since March, we had an active summer. Lytton has had very few cases of COVID so far, and we have begun to welcome a small number of people from the local area for meditation and Vespers in the evenings, and Sunday meditation and services at Mandala Hall, while observing the recommended health protocols.

We have also started to offer bi-weekly Dharma Talks and discussions via Zoom on Saturday afternoons. Anywhere from 25 to 40 people have attended, and we have gotten positive feedback regarding these meetings. If you are not on our mailing list and would like to be notified of future meetings, please drop us a line.

On Sunday, September 6, we were visited by a small delegation from Lingyen Mountain Buddhist Temple, which is in Richmond, BC. The temple had asked us, along with a number of Buddhist organizations, to participate in an Ullambana (Family Memorial) Festival, which they were holding “virtually” this year due to the pandemic. We sent them a tape of the monastic and lay community reciting Scriptures, which they played as our contribution. The two people who came offered incense and bows at the Mandala Hall altar and Kwan Yin statue, and presented us with many gifts and donations. After the presentation we held a memorial ceremony in honour of all the dead, during which names were read out of all those to whom people wished to offer merit.

We continue to make improvements to Mandala Hall. We bought a beautiful used Tibetan carpet depicting stylized lotus blossoms, approximately 6' by 3' which we are using as a bowing seat in front of the altar. We have installed a propane heater, which should allow us to use the hall through the winter. Unfortunately, we were not able to do the brickwork around the building as we had intended. We're hoping to do so next spring or summer.

After a cool and wet start to summer, we enjoyed some beautiful sunny weather, and we were able to plant a fairly successful vegetable garden with potatoes, carrots, peas, tomatoes, parsley and other herbs. We have also planted more fruit trees (cherries and apricots) and strawberry plants.

Another project that we have now completed was the installation of new electrical equipment for our off-grid power. We bought three new solar panels, new

deep-cycle batteries, charge controllers, and inverter. The new system works very well, giving us greater electrical capacity and over a kilowatt of potential charge from the panels.

We had our well water retested this summer, as it has been ten years since the last test. It indicated that our filtered water was very safe. There was a problem with a high coliform count in our raw tap water, so we sanitized the holding tank and pipes, after which the test results showed it was fine.

We also chopped and split most of the trees that were cut down earlier in the year because they were a safety hazard. Some of you may remember the “Master and Disciple” trees along the way from Prajnatarā. Apparently, the “Master Tree” was diseased, and it blew over in a strong wind this summer. It was a huge tree, one of the biggest on our property. Though we are sad to see it fall, it will provide us with a great deal of firewood.

On October 1, we hosted a moon watching gathering on the outside deck of Bodhidharma Hall, with two people from the local area as guests. It was a warm, lovely, relaxed evening. People brought “round” treats, and we all watched the autumn full moon rise over the eastern ridge.

We are pleased to inform everyone that Rev. Valeria, who is a US citizen, received her Permanent Resident Status this summer, after waiting for several years for it to be approved.

IN 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 three months, in addition to monetary donations, we are grateful to have received the following: sun-dried tomatoes, candy, marzipan, gluten flour, pecans, Swiss chard, soy protein, apples, sponge cake, peaches, olives, pickle chips, figs, pasta sauces, paprika, lychees, curry sauce, quinoa, tofu, cheese,

paneer, jam, mushrooms, coconut-passion fruit jelly, mixed nuts, Manuka honey, regular honey, coffee, pizza, bananas, instant noodle soup, apples, lavender, instant scalloped potatoes, yogurt, cherry juice, tomato sauce, Devon sauce, canned peas, cooked meals, samosas, homemade cheesecake, crabapples, lettuce, tomatoes, raisins, lychee jelly, liquorice, nutmeg, cookies, macaroni and cheese, canned tomatoes, lemon juice, olive oil, apricot preserves, mooncakes, pasta, mango juice, Perrier water, fruit salad, sesame-cocoa spread, evaporated milk, canned beans and corn, Chow Mein noodles, mayo, mustard, canned mushrooms, squash, pears, grapes, oatmeal, pear butter, crackers, kiwi fruit, almonds, chestnuts, biscuits, plums and apples, food and treats for the dogs and cat, face masks, hand sanitizers, a Buddha cloth, a Hotei statue, Christmas ornaments, an empty jar, a car window protector, a Buddha statue, two vases, flower seeds, various household tools, a children's book, a scripture chanter, lavender plants, food containers, cactus plants, rosaries, fern plants.

Thank you to everyone who supports us through their donations of money, time, skill, talent and labour, and for your ongoing spiritual practice and training, the merit of which is incalculable.

Shasta Abbey Retreat Schedule

*(offered via internet: please contact the guestmaster
<https://shastaabbey.org/contact/>)*

Nov. 13 – 15 Introductory Retreat

Dec. 20/20 - Jan. 1/21 New Year Celebratory Retreat