



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

## *Lions Gate Buddhist Priory*

### *NEWSLETTER*

*November 2021*

*Issue #133*

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.

## **Rest in the Present Moment**

*The following is a transcript of a Dharma Talk offered by Rev. Master Aurelian on October 23, 2021. It has been edited for clarity.*

Homage to the Buddha.

Homage to the Dharma.

Homage to the Sangha.

The following is a quote from Hui Neng (J: Daikon Eno), who was the Sixth Chinese Ancestor and a highly regarded teacher in our lineage. He wrote something called The Platform Sutra, and this is an excerpt from it:

“In this moment, there is nothing which comes to be. In this moment there is nothing which ceases to be. Thus, in this moment, there is no birth and death to be brought to an end. Thus, there is absolute peace in this present moment. Although it is just this moment, there is no limit to this moment, and herein is eternal delight.”

In our lives, we become busy, whether as a monk or a lay person. We have much to do. And many people, if they don't have anything to do, get anxious and then find something to do, because they think that doing something, and especially accomplishing something, is one of the most important things in their lives. There's an old bumper sticker that one used to see, showing somebody meditating, and the caption was “Don't just do something. Sit there.”

There is a time for activity, and there is a time for rest. I think the quote from Hui Neng is helpful for us, in that we may realise that even while we are doing something and going about our busy lives, we can rest in the present moment. The present moment is all that we have, and within it, as he says, is eternal delight.

We train ourselves to do this through the practice of serene reflection meditation. Sitting still in what we call formal meditation and staring at a wall might seem like

a completely useless thing to do. It might seem like it's wasting time. I have found that it is the most important thing to do. Sitting still, looking at a wall, and then bringing that mind of meditation to everything that I'm doing in my daily life. I don't do it perfectly by any stretch of the imagination. In doing sitting meditation, we are taught, "When you find your mind wandering, bring it back to just sitting." And, when I'm going about doing my tasks or whatever it is I am doing in my daily activity, I can bring that teaching to bear.

This is what's called practicing mindfulness. And that term, "mindfulness" has been...well, people have begun to commodify it and do all sorts of seminars where they are charging money for it, and all that sort of thing. Selling it, as it were. It's unfortunate. I suppose it's helpful for those people who go to these things and pay their money. But it doesn't go very deep.

Reverend Master Daizui used to give a talk, at beginners' retreats at Shasta Abbey, on mindfulness. He said, "There are four rules to mindfulness: One, pay attention to what you are doing. Two, when you find your mind has wandered, bring it back to paying attention to what you are doing. Three, repeat the first two steps over and over. Four, if your mind is continually going towards something else, then put down what you are doing and pay attention to the thing that your mind is going towards."

For me, mindfulness means being aware of what my mind is doing. Let's say someone is annoying you, and you get carried away with the annoyance, or they say something and you say something back; we all know how these types of arguments arise. Before you know it, you are not in the mind of meditation anymore, and you may be saying and doing things that you later regret. So we practice mindfulness, and at any time during that argument, you have the opportunity to just go back to paying attention to what your mind is doing, and to just drop it. It is very difficult, when you are in the middle of a disagreement or an argument with someone, to just drop it, but it has some helpful consequences; because if you drop it, then the other person is kind of arguing with themselves. It doesn't mean you are turning away from the person.

Well, I can feel myself going down a tangent that I don't mean to go down. So we can talk about that particular thing at another time and place, or maybe afterwards when people can ask questions.

The thing that I did want to talk about today is resting in the present moment, and how to do that. For me, that means taking refuge. This is from Venerable Narada Thera's translation, Chapter 14 of the Dhammapada, entitled "Release from suffering is gained by seeking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha."

"To many a refuge, fear-stricken people betake themselves — to hills, woods, groves, trees, and shrines. Nay, no such refuge is safe. No such refuge is supreme. By not resorting to such a refuge is one freed from all ill. The one who has gone for refuge to the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha sees with right knowledge the Four Noble Truths: sorrow, the cause of sorrow, the transcending of sorrow, and the Noble Eightfold Path which leads to the cessation of sorrow. This is indeed a secure refuge. This is indeed a supreme refuge. By seeking such refuge, one is released from all sorrow."

Each one of these verses comes with a story. There were all kinds of teachers teaching all sorts of things in ancient India, and there are to this day. The Buddha said these verses when a teacher from a different tradition instructed his disciples that by seeking refuge in mountains and forests, they would get rid of suffering. The Buddha spoke on the efficacy of the Three Refuges for deliverance from suffering. And this is the Venerable Narada Thera's note on that:

"One's best refuge is oneself. A Buddhist seeks refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, as the Teacher, the Teaching and what is taught, in order to gain his or her own deliverance from the ills of life. The Buddha is the supreme teacher who shows the way to deliverance. The Dharma is the unique way. The Sangha represents those who have been taught, who have followed the way and have become living

examples. One formally becomes a Buddhist by intelligently seeking refuge in this Triple Gem of Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. A Buddhist does not seek refuge in the Buddha in the hope that he or she will be saved by a personal act of deliverance. The confidence of a Buddhist in the Buddha is like that of a sick person in a noted physician or of a student in his teacher.”

There is a lot in there. What he is talking about is having faith in the Buddha, faith in what he taught, faith in the community of practitioners. This faith, as Rev. Master Jiyu said, is not a blind faith. We don't blindly follow our teachers or our fellow trainees, because sometimes they may lead you right off a cliff. The faith required is what Rev. Master Jiyu called perfect faith. And that is an understanding of and a confidence in what Hui Neng was talking about: Unborn Buddha Nature.

So to me, that's what refuge means. A teacher is a human being, and they may have blind spots or faults. And — or but — for me, it is necessary to try to see where my Teacher is pointing and to try to look in that direction rather than get caught up in his pointing finger. Often it will be some sort of situation arising that “pings” my koan, and he will point out that my koan is being pinged. What I find helpful is avoiding getting caught up in the actual details of the circumstance which is causing the ping, but rather to try to look towards what he is pointing to, which is: “Where is selfishness arising, and how can I abandon it or let go of it?” Often, the way it happens between him and me is I get upset about something. He will point to my koan. And I will continue to be upset about “the something.” Then I will go away and I will try to sit still, and almost always what happens is that I will see what he is pointing at.

I'll give you an example: When I was a very new monk, probably in my first couple of months, I was doing the very, very best I could. I was trying to be perfect in all things. One day, Rev. Master slept in. So, I got up, I did my meditation and Morning Service on my own. And he didn't come out of his room until it was close to lunchtime. So I thought, well, I will start to cook lunch. And I was in the midst of preparing this lunch, which was more intricate than necessary — a tendency that

I had at that time, to make the best lunch ever made. It would have all sorts of elements. And I was trying to juggle with them all at the same time, and I dropped a piece of potato on the floor. I was aware of it, but I had to do five other things at the same time. And at that moment, Rev. Master came into the kitchen. And perhaps he was a bit cranky, and he said “What are you doing?”

I said, “Oh, I’m cooking lunch for us; it’s almost lunchtime.”

He said, “Well, you dropped a piece of potato on the floor.”

I didn’t reply, but it just made me so angry. Once I got everything under control, I went to him, and I said, “You know, I don’t think that was fair. I knew the potato had dropped on the floor, and I was getting to it, but I was doing a million other things at the same time, cooking LUNCH!”

He said, “Okay. Okay.”

Then I said, “And besides, you slept in this morning and I didn’t!”

And he said, “Yes. And that is my training.”

Well, that stopped me. That was his training. He was aware that he had slept in. Perhaps it would have been better if he got up, perhaps not. That was his training.

This is an example of my not taking refuge while doing my daily activities. That sort of thing often happens with new monks. They really want to be perfect new monks. And this attitude actually gets in their way.

I am going to read Hui Neng’s quote again, because I think it’s really lovely and bears repeating:

“In this moment, there is nothing which comes to be. In this moment there is nothing which ceases to be. Thus, in this moment, there is no birth and death to be brought to an end.

Thus, there is absolute peace in this present moment. Although it is just this moment, there is no limit to this moment, and herein is eternal delight.”

If I can remember to rest in this present moment which, as Hui Neng says, has no limits — this present moment is vast...this present moment IS the Unborn — and if I can remember to rest in this present moment, then I am taking refuge.

I will leave you with a quote by Nyoshul Khenpho Rimpoche. He was a great Tibetan lama who died in 1999.

“Rest in natural great peace  
This exhausted mind, beaten helplessly by karma and neurotic thoughts  
Like the relentless fury of the pounding waves  
In the infinite ocean of samsara.  
Rest in natural great peace.”

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

## **News November 2021**

In mid-November, after a summer of devastating fire that almost completely destroyed our village and threatened our temple buildings, we experienced a “once-in-one-hundred year” rain event, which meteorologists call an “atmospheric river,” and we have experienced two more such events subsequent to the first one. Our 1.5 km-long driveway has drained well, thanks to all the ditching work John has been doing. All road and rail connections to Vancouver and the coastal areas have been cut off, due to the massive flooding and washouts, with huge sections of farmland, houses, cities, towns and villages under water, and major highways

blocked due to mudslides and washouts. Tragically, several people have died in the slides. We now have access to the closest town of Lillooet and places further east. Some roads to Vancouver are opening as I write this.

Throughout these calamities, we have done our best to continue our monastic practice. We continue with our daily schedule, and we offer Dharma meetings via Zoom twice a week, to which all are welcome. If you are not on our mailing list and would like to receive notices and links to these meetings, please feel free to contact us.

We are slowly opening our doors to visitors. Current health regulations do not limit the number of attendees to religious gatherings, and a few people have been attending Sunday meditation and services. All visitors must be fully vaccinated.

On October 31, we celebrated Segaki (Feeding of the Hungry Ghosts), the first time we have held this ceremony in two years. Five people attended. On a bright, cold morning we set up the altar, filled with “good food from the mountains, fields and oceans,” and dedicated the merit to all the dead, especially those who have died in difficulty. In November, we celebrated the Founders Ceremony, offering our gratitude to our Founder, Keido Chisen Koho, Zenji, and to Rev. Master Jiyu, Founder of our Order and first Abbess of Shasta Abbey. We celebrated Remembrance Day on November 14, and held a memorial on November 21 for Mrs. Margaret Kardell, an old friend and supporter of Rev. Master Koten, who passed away earlier in the month at the venerable age of 100.

On September 10, Mogi Wong passed away in Vancouver at the age of 95. Mogi was a lay disciple of Rev. Master Koten, and had been present at Rev. Master Jiyu’s ordination in Malaysia in 1962. Rev. Master Koten officiated at her funeral the next day, assisted by Rev. Master Aurelian. In late October a group of close friends attended a memorial service for her at Mandala Hall and scattered her ashes around the Kwan Yin statue, as she had wished. She was a blessing to all who knew her.

Throughout the fall, in addition to our daily schedule of meditation, etc., we have been working on getting things ready for the winter, including cutting and stacking firewood, burning brush-piles, landscaping, road-work, and other various jobs around the property. We have enough good wood for the winter.

## **IN GRATITUDE**

**The Priory, our community, and our 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 the many monetary donations, we have received the following: chocolate fudge cake, egg rolls, cheese, chutney, cookies, prepared meals, a box of apples, oatmeal groats, potatoes, tomatoes, bananas, kiwi fruit, grapes, apples, pomelos, cake, oranges, butter, soup, samosas, cream, scones, sticky rice with mushrooms, soup, fresh pineapples, avocados, taro cake with hoisin sauce, pizza, vegetables, salad dressing, Halloween cake, shortbread cookies, coffee, chocolate bars, dog and cat food and treats, Buddhist roars and trinkets. Thank you to everyone who brought items for the Segaki celebrations; to the Fandriches for a box of apples from their trees and for anti-bacterial wipes and masks; to our neighbours Trish and Donny, who invited us for a sumptuous Thanksgiving dinner and sent us home with leftovers; to Roger and Joy who mailed us a box containing ginger cookies, crabapple jelly, apple butter, green tomato relish (all homemade), and handmade bookmarks; to the Skuppah First Nations Band who gave us hand wipes and a gift bag containing gift cards, toiletries and other useful household items; and to everyone who offered their time, expertise, money, and the merit of their training. We are deeply grateful.

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

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### **Shasta Abbey Retreat Schedule**

*( Due to health concerns, retreats in the New Year will be decided at that time )*

Dec. 29-31 New Year Celebratory Retreat (online)

Feb. 11-13 Introductory Retreat

Feb. 22-24 Silent Meditation Retreat

Mar. 3- 6 Continuing Practice Retreat

Mar. 22-24 Silent Meditation Retreat

Apr. 1-3 Introductory Retreat

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