



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

Lions Gate Buddhist Priory

NEWSLETTER

*August 2022
Issue #136*

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.

The Way-Seeking Mind
Rev. Master Aurelian Giles

This is a transcription of a talk given at Lions Gate Buddhist Priory in November 2021.

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

Rev. Master Jiyu said, several times, some version of the following: “If you’re going to sit in front of a wall and practice meditation, you run the risk of being grabbed by the Cosmic Buddha.” There is a lot in that short statement. People come to meditation practice and to Buddhism for a lot of different reasons; and probably not everyone is looking for the full enlightenment of a Buddha. It may be that they just want to feel a little bit better, become a bit happier, or become calmer.

In my case, I was a very young man living and working in a small town in rural Alberta, quite lonely, and I would go to the bar every night and drink beer and go to my room and fall asleep, sometimes pass out, and then wake up and go to work in the morning. I came across an article in a Reader’s Digest about how to meditate. This would be 1973 or 1974, I was 19 or 20 years old. And there was a lot of discussion about meditation at that time. There were all kinds of different practices. Some were probably not very good; the people who were teaching them may have had motives of fame and gain rather than handing on and teaching a tradition.

The article that I read told about how to meditate using a mantra, and it largely dealt with the physiological benefits of doing so. The writer was a professor in Harvard, who did studies that proved that meditation calmed people down, lowered their blood pressure, made them calmer; he proved this through measurable means. He tested their brain waves and things like that.

So I thought, “Oh. Wow. Okay.” I was actually deeply unhappy. I didn’t realise how unhappy I was at the time. So I tried it out. The instructions were that one needed to carry it out on several days in a row before feeling any benefits. I did this every night when I got back from work. And I remember the third or fourth night, I got back from work, had some supper, and went to the bar. I was sitting there, and everything seemed clearer to me, and I felt different. I felt calm. And I didn’t even want to finish drinking my beer. I think I might have even left the bar without finishing it, which was unbelievable to me. That was the beginning of my search. I didn’t realise at the time that I was on a search.

Great Master Dōgen and other teachers have talked about what Dōgen called “arousing the Way-seeking mind”. This is also called Bodhicitta in Sanskrit. It means the heart or the mind that seeks the Way. The heart of a Bodhisattva.

As I said, I didn’t realise I was on a journey to try to become a Bodhisattva; I just wanted to feel better. Lama Yeshe gave a talk about that, and he said that if you are just practicing to feel a bit better then you are not going to get very much out of it. But that is where I started.

I’d like to read what Great Master Dōgen said. This is from a book called *Shōbōgenzō Zuimonki*¹ translated by a monk named Shohaku Okumura. Someone asked Dōgen the following question:

Although many years have passed since aspiring to learn the Way, I have not yet had any realisation. Many of the ancient teachers have said that the Way does not depend on intelligence or wisdom. Therefore, I don’t think we should demean ourselves because of our inferior capacity. Is there something about this that has been handed down in the tradition that I should keep in mind?

Dōgen starts off by saying that the questioner is right about “not relying on intelligence, talent, quick-wittedness, or wisdom in learning the Way.” Then he says, “However, it is wrong to mistakenly encourage a person to become blind,

¹ Okumura, Shohaku, translator: *Shobogenzo Zuimonki*, (Wisdom Publications, 2022) pp 92-94

deaf, or ignorant.” In other words, if we are going to start on the path, we should allow for the possibility that we might find what we are looking for. This is what Rev. Master Jiyu was saying.

Great Master Dōgen goes on to say this: “I believe this. It depends only on whether one’s aspiration is firmly determined or not. A person who arouses true aspiration and studies as hard as his capacity allows will not fail to attain the Way.” My teacher, Rev. Master Kōten, has put it this way: “If you are the type of person who is looking for this sort of thing, you are the type of person who will find it.”

Great Master Dōgen goes on to say, “We have to be careful to concentrate on and directly carry out the following practice: first of all, just maintain the aspiration to earnestly seek.” He then gives examples, saying that if a person is single-mindedly focused on something, then all their efforts are going to be towards achieving that thing. He says:

In the same way, if the aspiration to seek the way is earnest enough, when you practice shikan-taza [Serene Reflection Meditation], or study the kōans, or meet your Teacher, though the aim is high, you will hit the mark. Though it is deep, you will fish it out. Next, to arouse such an aspiration, think deeply in your heart of the impermanence of the world.

This is something he talks about over and over again in his writings. He says that seeing into impermanence completely is enlightenment itself.

It is not a matter of meditating using some provisional method of contemplation. It is not a matter of fabricating in our heads that which does truly not really exist. Impermanence is truly the reality right in front of our eyes. We need not wait from some teaching from others, proof from some passage of scripture, or some principle. Born in the morning, dead in the evening. A person we saw yesterday is no longer here today. These are the facts we see with our eyes and hear with our ears. This is what we see and hear about others. Applying this to our own bodies, and thinking of the reality of all things, though we expect to live for 70 or 80 years, we die when we must die. During our lifetime, though we may see the reality of sorrow, pleasure, love of our families, and hatred of our

enemies, these are not really worthy matters. We could spend time letting go of them. In reality, it is only today or even this moment that we can thus think of worldly affairs or of the Buddha Way. Therefore, in such an unpredictable world, it is extremely foolish to waste time worrying about various ways of earning a living in order to postpone one's death, uncertain as it is, to say nothing of plotting evil against others.

Sometimes, I think people can find the teachings of Buddhism kind of depressing, or make them feel despair. But that is when we are looking at it from our own selfish point of view. The reality, as he said, is that everything is impermanent; impermanence is right before us at this very moment. And this impermanence is emptiness, and this emptiness is Great Compassion itself.

Let us 'fast forward' a few years later in my life. I had realised that I wanted to study Buddhism; or at least, I was drawn to it. I didn't really want to study anything. I was very mixed up by this time. Forget about going to the bar every night for a beer. I was in the throes of an alcohol and drug habit. Yet, I was still drawn to meditation and Buddhism. There was a meditation group in Vancouver that was associated with Shasta Abbey, and Lions Gate Buddhist Priory emerged out of that group. The group would host meditation weekends every month or so. A monk would travel up from the Abbey and teach. There would be quite a lot of meditation through the day. I would really look forward to going to these retreats, not so much to hear what the monk had to say, but rather I looked forward to the meditation because I would leave with that same feeling of clarity and calmness that I had experienced years ago. I was grasping after those feelings. I was very selfish in my motivations. And the feelings of calmness and clarity would disperse very quickly, because I would return to my old habits. And I thought that somehow I could do that: use the meditation to feel calm and continue with my other habits.

Lama Yeshe, a Tibetan teacher, put it this way in the last series of public talks that he gave shortly before his death in 1984:

Without bodhicitta, nothing works. And most of all, your meditation doesn't work, and realisations don't come. Why is bodhicitta necessary for success in meditation? Because of selfish grasping. If you have a

good meditation but don't have bodhicitta, you will grasp at any little experience of bliss: "Me, me; I want more, I want more." Then the good experience disappears completely... "Me, me, I'm miserable, I want to be happy. Therefore I'll meditate." It doesn't work that way. For some reason good meditation and its results—peacefulness, satisfaction and bliss—just don't come.²

I don't want to go into a whole autobiography, let's just say that things evolved. And here I am, a monk. Who would have thought?

There is something else I want to say about this. I had been grabbed by the Cosmic Buddha the very first time I sat down to meditate; I just didn't realise it. Something within me had given rise to seeking true freedom from suffering. I didn't know this at the time. I was still floundering around, thinking I could just continue to stomp my way through life and be completely irresponsible and have the benefits of Buddhism. Nevertheless, something in me had been awakened.

I will tell this story about myself, because it's important. The day I quit drinking, I had gone out at 11 o'clock in the morning with friends, and we were barhopping all day. I was drinking all day and getting drunker as the day wore on. But I couldn't find that 'thing' that I was looking for when I drank, which was to get oblivious to the suffering that I felt. That was why I drank. And it was, quite literally, as if there was a being sitting on my shoulder watching me. Not judging, just watching. And I could not turn away from that being, which was my own awareness. I could not turn away from my own awareness of what I was doing, how silly I was, thinking I was sophisticated and grown up, when I was acting like a fool. That night I went home to my house, about midnight, and what happened was that I heard an interior voice that said, "If you continue to do this, you are going to die." At that time, my father, who was a very desperate alcoholic, had about two years left to live; he was drinking himself into his grave. What that voice said was, "If you continue to do this, you will end up like him, and you will die." And I didn't want to die. I broke down, and basically, it was the way it says in the Litany of the Great

² Yeshe, Lama Thubten: *The Enlightened Experience, Collected Teachings: Volume 3*, (Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive, Boston, 2020) p. 50

Compassionate One, “All, all is defilement, earth, earth.” That is what I felt. It was all defiled. And I cried out. “To Indra the creator I cry.” I cried out in my heart. And Great Compassion answered.

I would like to be able to say it was a clear path up the mountain after that, but it wasn't. It was very, very difficult. That was the last time I drank. But it wasn't easy. Because I had to look at the wreckage of my life and all my karmic wake. If I looked behind me I would see that I had cut a swathe of destruction. And I had to do something about that.

I'm really, really grateful that I was able to discover Buddhism, because it saved my life. And what I want to say is, we should not judge ourselves. If we think we are a really horrible trainee; if we think of all the things we haven't done or have done which we then decide makes it impossible for us to achieve the Way, we shouldn't do that, we shouldn't think that way. Because you are here, you have come here because you are earnestly seeking. You may not know it or feel it, but Bodhicitta has been awakened in you. And the promise, as it is said, is true: “If you are the person who looks for these things, then you are the person who will find them.” And you never know. You might be a moment away from becoming a fully enlightened Buddha.

I remember Rev. Master Kōten said to me once, “You should never look down on a person who is passed out drunk in the gutter. They might be doing really deep Bodhisattva practice. Don't judge yourself, and don't judge others.”

When I was a new monk, there was someone who was coming to the Priory who was painfully sincere. And it sort of bothered me, and I said to Rev. Master Kōten, “Don't you think it's just a bit much?” And he said, “Just ignore that. Ignore that thought going through your head. That person is deeply sincere. And that is what you need to see.” And that was a very helpful piece of advice.

What I am talking about might be called, in other traditions, the “awakening of faith.” And if you think you don't have any faith, well, you are here. So you must have some sort of faith. As Rev. Master Jiyu said, “We all of us believe that when the sun goes down, it will come up in the morning. But there is no proof of that. We just have faith that it will.”

There is an old joke. A pastor is preaching to his flock. “Brothers and sisters, you have come here to pray for rain. Well, I ask you: where are your umbrellas?”

Homage to all the Buddhas in all worlds.

Homage to all the Bodhisattvas in all worlds.

Homage to The Scripture of Great Wisdom.

Priory News

August 2022

We have had a pleasant summer after an unusually cold, wet spring. The temperatures have been hot at times, but nothing approaching the heat of last summer. Another fire occurred in our general vicinity. This one was on the other side of the Fraser River. It flared up quickly, and like last summer, many people had to flee in a big hurry. Sadly, several homes were lost. The fire has now gone into the high mountains of the Stein Valley, and it is being closely monitored by firefighter personnel.

Over the past few months, in addition to festival ceremonies, we have conducted several private memorials for deceased love ones. On May 27, we attended a Celebration of Life for Irene Buttuls, a local friend, at the Buttuls’ residence, as she had requested. We sang Dedication of Merit, and Rev. Master Aurelian said a few words in remembrance of her.

On Saturday, July 23, we held a large public animal memorial for all the pets and other animals who perished in last year’s fires. About 15 people attended, many of whom traveled a considerable distance. The ceremony had been announced on Facebook, and we received a very long list of names of pets and animals which were read at the beginning of the ceremony. Afterwards, we had a social tea, with cakes, beverages, and doughnuts.

We continue to hold Zoom Dharma meetings on Thursday evenings and Saturday afternoons. If you would like to receive notices of these meetings, please contact us.

We are very happy to be able to welcome visitors and retreat guests again. We have held two day retreats on Saturdays, and we have welcomed many visitors from British Columbia and other parts of Canada over the summer. Some stayed for several days and others visited for a few hours. You are most welcome to visit, for an hour or a few days or longer. We have several options for overnight guests. If you are interested in attending a retreat or coming to stay at other times, please feel free to contact us.

**NOTICE: The post office is up and running in the area again. Our mailing address has reverted to the original: PO BOX 701, LYTTON, BC V0K 1Z0.
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 generous donations of money, we are grateful to have received the following: avocados, oranges, grapes, soy milk, milk, water, muffins, cupcakes, cookies, tea, prepared meals, cassava cake, bananas, apples, strawberries, pineapple, papaya, persimmons, sponge cake, coconut milk, instant noodles, pies, tomatoes, crackers, fresh ginger, apple juice, almond nougat, safe, Pepsi, walnuts, cheese, coffee, shallots, teas, halva, bread yeast, coconut buns, doughnuts, sweets, apricots, cookies, canned tomatoes, canned beans, pasta, canned vegetables, cooking oil, vinegar, potatoes, carrots, nuts and seeds, tomato paste, red lentils, canned fruit, cherries, lychee, peaches, nectarines, samosas with sauce, honeydew and watermelons, cantaloupes, celery, tofu and tempeh, blueberries, fresh mint, fresh basil, sweet potatoes, beets, potatoes, olive oil, squash, mangoes, coffee cream, brownies, plums, butter, porridge, dates, mango pulp, chilli paste, peanut sauce, fruit juice, wasabi mayonnaise, chilli oil, pickles, Asiago cheese, bread, mustard, mango chutney, medicine and vitamins, potato chips, a dog brush, tuna for pets, cat treats, chainsaw oil, pens, envelopes, a small fan, notepads, stamps, a fruit bowl, a flame spreader, garden seeds, a rain poncho, a tea cup, a cushion. We are grateful for everyone who has offered their spiritual practice and training, the merit of which which is unmeasurable. Thank you!

Shasta Abbey Retreat Schedule

Sept. 3 Online Day Introductory Retreat

Oct. 14-16 Introductory Retreat

Oct. 27-30 Hungry Ghost Retreat

Nov. 11-13. Introductory Retreat

Dec. 29- Jan.1 New Year Celebratory Retreat