

**NEW
CH'AN
FORUM
禪**

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Dharma Adviser

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CH'AN ATTITUDES, CH'AN CHALLENGES

Challenge seems to be the theme of this issue. Exciting and dynamic new challenges are facing the Western Ch'an Fellowship as we take on the duties and responsibilities of a charity.

All kinds of new developments are being discussed, from training new teachers to improving ritual - some of these are considered in the Editorial from the Ch'an Hall where John looks back to the early years at Maenllwyd, summarising some of the changes that have taken place and some of the new developments. A lot seems to be happening very quickly; after long years of slow change, suddenly, in just a couple of years there are radical changes to the buildings at the Maenllwyd, and radical changes to the way in which the people connected with those buildings are learning to relate to each other. We might all benefit from keeping in mind the simple and beautiful reminders re-printed in Ch'an Attitudes from the Ch'an Center in New York.

Memorising a Sutra of 80,000 words is some challenge - even Shi-fu admits he didn't quite manage it. But Master Sheng-yen writes movingly and powerfully about the lifelong rewards that come from reading, studying and memorising the Sutras. Plenty of food for thought is provided too in David Fontana's account of journeys in Greece and in Eric Rommeluere's reflections on sitting in no-sense.

Some more homely accounts explore the challenges of every day life - bringing up children, relating to parents and learning to cook.

We are always interested in your views and ideas and feedback on the new developments. Further information on the Western Ch'an Fellowship and New Ch'an Forum are given on the back pages, together with contact addresses.

Editorial from the Ch'an Hall

Charity status for Western Ch'an Fellowship

Good news! The Western Ch'an Fellowship has been granted charity status by the Charity Commission. So we are fully in business and we invite all our readers to join us as Fellows. Naturally you have to be qualified¹ - so come along to our retreat programmes, establish an effective practice and we will soon be welcoming you.

The Western Ch'an Fellowship has developed from some twenty years of experience in offering retreats at the Maenllwyd. In that time things have changed. At the start the pioneers were tough and determined indeed; no heating; sleeping bags in the barely roofed barn with an owl for company; a lot of snoring; thunderbox toilets or worse; little space for sitting; wild Rajneesh action yogas; a lot of alternative therapy and the spirit of the sixties and seventies. Frankly, there has been nothing like it since. People took risks, were amazingly open, even to the extent of nudity in the 'kundalini' exercise - nobody minded. People were just 'doing their thing'. Indeed, there was very often a freedom, dedication and sheer joy in those retreats that is not so common today.

Nowadays, participants are less willing to confront their desires for comfort, for having an easy time. People often refer to their problems with early rising, the absence of mattresses, and are already accepting the presence of showers as some kind of right! All those early simplicities and the problems of adjusting to them were part of an essential self confrontation; not giving in to the aching body, the sleepless night. Those retreats were inner expeditions. In Tibetan 'Chod' one gives one's body to the demons. Most people find difficulty nowadays in offering it to the Buddha. Why? - the reason is obvious. We are all now 'consumers' and expect value for money. So, in addition to a retreat practice guaranteed to yield 'enlightenment', we want our home comforts. Sorry folks - at the Maenllwyd you pay for dis-comfort. Are you becoming soft? Do not think it goes unnoticed by the ancestors of twenty years ago.

Even so, perhaps the new comforts at the Maenllwyd have a good side to them. Retreat will undoubtedly be easier for beginners. And for the older generation it is a blessing. Perhaps then we can spread the Dharma in a gentler style well fitted to our time. Self confrontation is difficult enough in the practice of sitting on retreat and attempting koans. A little more physical kindness may be helpful. Yet we must be careful not to turn what were expeditions into mere tourism. To confront the bodily is perhaps the first move in self confrontation. If you want to cross the inner mountains the going is necessarily rough; your legs ache and you have no suncream. If you go by helicopter have you really gone at all? You are just imagining the route. So take care.

The Ch'an retreat is more formal today. We are introducing appropriate ritual during the two daily ceremonies and learning better chanting. This is a sign of greater respect for the tradition in which we focus most of our practice. It does not imply a leaning to

¹For details, see page 35

traditionalism. As Shi-fu told me - we have to find our own way in Britain. We British are a critical people with no great love for ceremony unless it is felt to be meaningful. This journal sustains a social critique of Buddhism itself and I believe this is fundamental at a time when two significant Buddhist organisations in Britain have proved unworthy in important respects.

A vital question concerns the training of future teachers. We have instituted training for meditation instructors and each local group leader will be expected to gain the certificate for this. Training for retreat leadership will be more demanding. Even for those with the requisite qualifications as counsellors or therapists, it needs hands-on training during the event. We will be asking some more experienced fellows to act as monitors on retreat and then as Guestmasters. In this way it will be possible to learn about the retreat process from the 'other side' as it were. Further thought will be put into this question.

Sue Blackmore's wonderful radio broadcast about Maenllwyd was extremely popular and we have had many enquiries. Many letters showed little awareness of what Zen was about. People loved the story line of the broadcast, remote cottage, log fires, meditation, peaceful tranquillity, chanting OM - very new agey. Some however had a more focused understanding and are likely to join us as the retreats roll by. We must come back to Sue whenever we want publicity!!

This issue contains an important article by Shi-fu on Sutra reading. I myself have become particularly attracted recently by the original Sutras. They reveal to us the sort of man the Buddha was and I recommend them to you. Recent translations available from Wisdom Press are outstanding. David Fontana reminisces about a journey he and I took together in Greece muttering our attempts at solving koans to one another. Eric Rommeluere, now a member of our Advisory Board, allowed me to translate and publish an insightful essay that delighted me when I read it on a visit to him in Paris. Carol Evans tells us about her childhood experience of her father. It is a moving account but some may ask where is the Zen in this? Zen lies at the heart of every strongly-felt relationship whether it is known or stated or not. If you haven't grasped that you need to start all over again. Ann Dickman raises some important issues about retreats. Then we welcome a helpful retreat report that bodes well for the kitchen and some poems.

Every good wish to you all.

John Crook

Ch'an attitudes

On the wall of the dining hall in the Ch'an Center in Elmhurst, New York, hangs a notice summarising the attitude to be adopted by resident and visiting practitioners. These suggestions seem to provide very sensible guidelines for a life of appropriate relatedness with others, not only within but also outside the meditation hall. So we present them here, slightly edited, for your reflection. They may provide a touchstone for effective living.

*Honour and respect the Three Jewels,
Look after body and mind,
Respect and follow the master's instructions,
Practice and study diligently.*

*Be neat and clean, simple and frugal,
Work hard and remain humble,
Be calm and tranquil,
Live in peace and harmony.*

*Respect and forgive one another,
Encourage and assist anyone with problems,
Discipline yourself to be attentive, serious, serene, modest,
Keep the precepts mindfully and do not boast.*

*Respect this house and its practitioners,
Do your best in everything,
See fame and possessions for what they are,
Forsake dependence upon them.*

*Avoid emotional turmoil, improper speech,
No inappropriate behaviour with the opposite sex,
Refrain from loud noisiness and thoughtless disturbance,
Do not waste time in idle chatter.*

*Neither fight nor insult one another,
Follow and respect a good example.
Abide by these guidelines and do not expect
misconduct to go unremarked.*

Reading sutras as a spiritual practice

Master Sheng-yen

A talk delivered at Tibet House in New York City, on 5 November, 1994 and edited by Linda Peer and Harry Miller, edited with permission for NCF by John Crook 1998. In this talk Shi-fu tells us about the traditional uses to which the Sutras are put in China. Some of us may like to make use of these methods. For Westerners Sutra reading is also important. In particular the oldest Sutras, the ones Ananda so carefully remembered and which begin: "Thus have I heard..." reveal for us exactly what Gautama the Buddha was like as a man teaching, instructing and dealing with everyday matters of life in the 6th century BC. Readers unfamiliar with the Sutras might well begin there, meeting the Tathagata in person in his daily life. Contemplating his actions and sermons is the root of Buddhism. (Eds.)

The Buddhist scriptures are divided into three categories. The Vinaya and Sila are moral codes and precepts spoken by the Buddha, the Shastras are commentaries on the Buddha's teachings by Bodhisattvas and great masters, and the Sutras are discourses spoken by the Buddha. Together they make up the Tripitaka. Each kind of scripture has special benefits. The Sutras are particularly concerned with the mind, and their function is the cultivation of samadhi and wisdom. The Vinaya helps us to behave in a correct and proper way, so that our actions, speech and thoughts accord with Buddhadharma. Finally, the Shastras help us to cultivate our analytical understanding of Buddhadharma.

The Heart Sutra is common to all Chinese Buddhist sects. Although the teachings and practices of the Ch'an school are not based on written words or language, we still recite Sutras. Perhaps this is surprising; the old masters often seemed disrespectful of the Sutras. Once a monk asked Master Lin-chi (Jp. Rinzai), the founder of one of the two schools of Ch'an which survive into our time, about the usefulness of the Sutras. Master Lin-chi said that they are very good for wiping up pus! A monk saw Ch'an Master Yao-shan reading a scripture and said, "Ch'an is not based on written words and language, so what are you doing reading scriptures?" Master Yao-shan replied, "I only use the scriptures to shade my eyes."

We can see from these stories that Ch'an does not place strong emphasis on scriptures. However, Ch'an teaching can be traced back to two Sutras, the Lankavatara Sutra (Sutra on the Descent to Sri Lanka) and the Diamond Sutra (Vajrachhedika Prajnaparamita-Sutra). Additionally the Heart Sutra is recited every day in Ch'an monastic communities.

The famous Sixth Patriarch, Hui-neng, was illiterate, but he became enlightened after overhearing a phrase from the Diamond Sutra. Obviously, reciting scriptures can be very useful, and we should do it. We may even be the catalyst for someone else's enlightenment!

Both the Chinese and Japanese traditions teach us to use the scriptures and the recitation of scriptures as a mirror in our practice. Reciting a Sutra should cause us to reflect on our actions of body, speech and mind. Do they accord with the Sutra we recite? If not, we should change our actions to pattern them on the scripture.

There are many methods of Sutra reading and recitation. We can read or recite silently. We can 'read' a Sutra, which means to read aloud, or we can 'recite,' which means either chanting aloud or reading a Sutra over and over again. We can also write out, or copy, a Sutra as a practice. And we can 'uphold' a Sutra. In 'upholding', the practitioner retains the Sutra in his or her memory at all

times. For instance, you might recite from memory and try to uphold the Heart Sutra for days at a time. This is often done silently. Why? Because, for instance, when you go to the toilet it would not be respectful to say the Sutra out loud. There is also a practice in which a practitioner who specializes in reciting a particular Sutra also explains the Sutra to others. 'Recitation through the physical body' is another method. This may sound strange, but it simply means to recite while kneeling. Furthermore, in the Lotus Sutra a method of reciting the Sutras while doing prostrations is taught. I will explain how this practice is done later.

Buddhists have probably practiced Sutra reading since the beginning of Buddhism. Early Buddhist texts on practice call recitation one of the three major practices. The 52nd fascicle of the Middle Length (Madhyama) Agamas, the earliest collection of Buddha's teachings, encourages practitioners to uphold and recite the Sutras, the Vinaya and the Shastras, as methods of practice. The Ten Pratimoksha (the Ten Moral Conducts) and the Martivasaka-Vinaya (the Vinaya in Five Sections) likewise recommend the practice of reciting the Vinaya.

The scriptures of Mahayana Buddhism again speak of the merit and function of Sutra recitation. The Lotus Sutra (the Saddharma-pundarika Sutra) is composed of twenty-eight fascicles, of which eighteen recommend the practice of Sutra recitation and 'adorning', or purifying, the six sense organs through scriptural recitation. The Savanaprabhasotama Sutra (the Golden Illumination Sutra) says that reciting and upholding the Sutra will enable one to go beyond the ocean of suffering and attain non-regression of Bodhi mind. In other words, the realization of the enlightened mind.

In the Pure Land sects, which are part of the Mahayana tradition, two major scriptures are used, the smaller Sukhavati-vyuha Sutra (the Sutra of the Land of Bliss) and the Amitayurdhyana Sutra (Sutra of Visualization). They are associated with Amitabha Buddha of the Western Pure Land, the major Buddha of the Pure Land sects, and they, too, describe upholding and reciting the Sutras.

The Brahma Net Sutra or the Brahmajala, contains moral codes, and I believe it is special to China. It recommends reciting the Sutras on behalf of the deceased in order to transfer merit to them.

Following all these recommendations, recitation has become one of the fundamentals of Buddhist practice in China. Some of the commonly recited Sutras are the Sukhavati-vyuha Sutra, the Lotus Sutra, Avatamsaka Sutra, the Diamond Sutra, the Heart Sutra, and the Vimilakirti Sutra. When I was a novice monk, my master told me to start by memorizing the Heart Sutra. Next, he told me to memorize the Sukhavati-vyuha Sutra, and after that, the Diamond Sutra. Finally, my master told me to memorize the Lotus Sutra, which is eighty thousand words long. I never memorized the whole Sutra, but I memorized most of it, and it has been of great help and benefit to me. If you want to learn to uphold a Sutra as a practice, you cannot read it; you have to memorize it. You have to retain it in your mind. Only when you can retain the Sutras in your memory can you practice upholding them instead of just reciting them.

It is also beneficial to memorize mantras and dharanis in addition to Sutras. The word 'dharani' means complete or universal upholding. A dharani completely encompasses the meanings and powers of whatever it is associated with, so reciting it is a powerful practice. For example, a dharani may be associated with a Bodhisattva. If you uphold that dharani, your practice is an expression of the merit, virtue and attainment of that Bodhisattva. In the same way, a dharani associated with a Buddha is an expression of the merit and virtue, practice and power of that Buddha.

Chinese Buddhists often memorize dharanis such as the long dharani from the Surangama Sutra, the Great Compassionate Dharani and the dharani from the Lotus Sutra. When I was young, my master told me to memorize a dharani from the Lotus Sutra. He said, "This dharani is very difficult to

pronounce and to memorize. If you can memorize it in a week, then in two months you can memorize the whole Lotus Sutra." Well, it turned that I couldn't memorize the Lotus Sutra Dharani, so I couldn't memorize the whole scripture.



There have been many versions of the Record of Eminent Monks coming from the Liang, the T'ang, Sung, and the Ming dynasties. In these records, eminent monks are categorized according to their kinds of practice, one of which is reciting and upholding the scriptures. Practitioners who use Sutra chanting as a major practice usually choose one Sutra to chant, commonly the Avatamsaka Sutra or the Lotus Sutra. Master Fa-tsang (643-712), the Fourth Patriarch of the Hua-yen Sect (whose teachings are based on the Avatamsaka Sutra), sat in meditation one night and overheard someone next door recite all eighty volumes of the Avatamsaka Sutra. Each volume of this Sutra is ten thousand words long, but in a flash he heard the Sutra from beginning to end, and understood it with utmost clarity. It is impossible to recite the Avatamsaka Sutra in one day. In a day, you can only recite ten volumes, so the whole Sutra would take eight days. Yet Fa-tsang experienced the recitation in a very short period. In another story an ancient practitioner who had recited the Avatamsaka Sutra for many years had no need to beg for food, because deities and Dharma protectors looked after him and brought him what he needed. In yet another story from long ago a practitioner recited the Lotus Sutra a few thousand times. When he died, a lotus flower blossomed from the mouth of his corpse.

If you wish to practice the formal recitation of scripture in the Chinese manner, you must wash your hands and mouth and dress with decorum. There must be an altar with a Buddha image. You adorn the image and make offerings to the Buddhas of flowers, food, fruit, light and so forth. With such preparations, you can recite with utmost sincerity.

You begin with a mantra of purification of body, speech and mind, then an opening gatha, followed by the actual Sutra. You may have had wandering thoughts and missed some words of the Sutra. Afterwards, you recite the 'Mantra to Make Up For Mistakes'. Convenient, isn't it? You may have had wandering thoughts while doing the recitation, yet a mantra makes up for all the mistakes you made! Finally, you recite the gatha for the transferring of merits, so that the benefits of your recitation are transferred to all beings.

What of the posture in reciting Sutras? It depends on the length of the scripture. You may kneel or stand for shorter Sutras. In most Chinese monasteries, the morning and evening services, which last

two hours, are done standing up. A whole-day recitation can be done kneeling or sitting, or alternating between the two. Sitting is either crosslegged on the floor, or on a chair. Kneeling is done by half-standing kneeling, so that one is not sitting on the heels. In the Chinese tradition, we usually adopt the half-standing position, while in the Japanese tradition practitioners usually sit on their heels.

The Japanese have special methods of scriptural recitation. They did not translate the Chinese scriptures into Japanese. Rather, they use the original Chinese characters, so reading the scriptures is quite involved. Alone, they recite the Japanese pronunciation of the Chinese characters. This involves the reading and understanding of the scripture. In group practice, they also read phonetically, pronouncing the characters in Japanese to an accompaniment of drumming on the wooden fish. It follows that when the Japanese recite Sutras in Chinese it is like reading dharanis or mantras. They do not understand the meaning; they simply recite the sounds. This is difficult and praiseworthy, for the Sutras that they recite are often long. For instance, the Avatamsaka Sutra is eighty fascicles, the Parinirvana Sutra is thirty fascicles, and the great Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra is 600 fascicles. Their ardour in performing such difficult recitation is indeed praiseworthy.

The Japanese, however, also have a shortcut. Reciting the whole Sutra, character by character, is called 'true recitation'. As we have seen this is quite strenuous, so the Japanese have invented another kind of reading, which is called 'turning recitation'. Here the title of the scripture is recited once to represent each fascicle, while the pages of the scripture are turned. For example, for each of the eighty fascicles of the Avatamsaka Sutra, they recite, 'Homage to the Mahavaipulya Avatamsaka Sutra,' and flip through the pages!

When I was in Japan, I visited a monastery and the monks told me that they were going to recite the Avatamsaka Sutra that day. I was impressed, and said, "You're going to recite the Avatamsaka Sutra! How are you going to finish it?" They said, "No problem. We'll finish." This was before I found out how they were going to do it. Using this method, even the 600-fascicle Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra can be 'recited' in a short period of time. As far as I know, 'turning recitation' exists only in Japan, not in China.

In the Lotus Sutra we find a recitation with prostration practice. You recite the Sutra character by character, and after each word you perform a prostration and recite a phrase of homage to the Bodhisattvas who were in the assembly when the Sutra was delivered. Some practitioners in China recite the Diamond and Avatamsaka Sutras in this way. You must be thoroughly familiar with the scripture before you engage in this practice in order not to prostrate without understanding the words.

Sutras usually begin with 'Thus have I heard...' In Chinese this phrase is four characters, just as it is four words in English. So you would start by saying, 'Thus', and then you would prostrate to all the Bodhisattvas and the Buddhas associated with this scripture. For example, if you are practising the Lotus Sutra, you say, 'Thus,' and then prostrate while chanting aloud, 'Homage to the Lotus Sutra, Homage to the Assembly of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas present at the Lotus Sutra Assembly.' I have done this practice myself.

Some of you may be familiar with the Nichiren Sho-shu sect in Japan, which associates itself with the Lotus Sutra. They do not prostrate, but they recite the title of the Lotus Sutra. When you engage in this practice, do not recite or prostrate quickly. The idea is not to finish the scripture too soon.

In the Tibetan tradition, practitioners do the 'four uncommon preparatory practices', one of which is one-hundred-thousand prostrations. It doesn't take quite that many prostrations for the Lotus Sutra. There are only eighty thousand characters!

Now I would like to talk about six benefits derived from reading the scriptures. The Dharma is never fixed. Although I only mention a few benefits, there may be innumerable others, so please tell me if you think of any I may miss out.

First, by reading the scriptures we can realize mind, or 'illuminate the mind'. When we engage in Sutra recitation, we make use of the Sutra as a mirror to reflect back the reciting mind. This mind, prior to practice, is full of darkness and ignorance. We take the Sutra as a mirror by which we can model our behavior, until our minds fuse with the Sutra, and we directly realize the nature of our mind. I tell this to my monks and nuns in Taiwan but they refuse to understand. They ask, "Why don't you explain the Sutra first? Then it will be easier to read and memorize."

Second, Sutra reading can help us understand the meaning behind the Sutras. When I was a novice, I asked my master the meaning of the scriptures. All he said was, "Just keep reading, and you'll understand". Now I realise that complete familiarity with the Sutras naturally elicits the meaning.

Third, Sutra recitation can be *samadhi* or one-pointed concentration practice. I teach my disciples to use their ears to listen while they follow the chanting and not think about the meaning. One should use the mind to be fully aware of hearing as well as of one's own recitation. When you are alone, of course, you listen to your own voice reciting. But in group practice it is better to listen to other people's recitation. After all, one's own voice is really of no use, because you are unlikely to enter into *samadhi* by listening to it! How we enjoy listening to the sound of our own voices! Such attachment prevents us from entering *samadhi*. It is more helpful to do Sutra recitation in a group because then you can listen to others' voices in harmony.

A *fourth* benefit of Sutra recitation is the spreading of the Dharma. The Sixth Patriarch of Ch'an realized enlightenment upon hearing a layman recite a phrase from the Diamond Sutra: 'Let the mind arise without dwelling on anything'. In reciting Sutras do not be concerned with your own enlightenment. It is not important, so long as someone else achieves enlightenment.

Reciting Sutras can cause the ripening of another's virtuous karmic root. A non-Buddhist I know was travelling on a boat, feeling anxious and agitated. Next to him, a woman recited the Heart Sutra aloud. Since he had nothing better to do, he listened to her. After a while his mind became settled. That stimulated his interest. He thought, 'If just listening to scriptural recitation can benefit me, how much more will I benefit if I do the recitation myself.' He began to recite scriptures, and finally became a Buddhist.

The *fifth* benefit of scriptural recitation is the protection of Buddhadharma. The Mahayana scriptures say that whenever a person recites and upholds the sutras it is a manifestation of the Tathagata, the Buddha. Wherever there is recitation, there is the presence of the Buddha. Also, the Dharma-protectors and deities from the ten directions protect the people reciting and the area around them.

If we want to make Buddhadharma last in the world, it is not enough that the Sutras be present. We must recite and uphold the Sutras. If the scriptures exist, but no one recites and makes use of them, then they are just pieces of paper. They are very good for wiping pus, as Master Lin-chi said. But when they are recited and upheld, then they become Buddhist scriptures.

Sixth, Sutra recitation can be done to benefit the deceased. We can wish for their merit and virtue. Buddhists usually want Sutras to be recited for deceased family members. Some time ago, I had a Western student who placed great emphasis on seated meditation and practiced all the time. It happened that one of his close friends passed away, and he felt lost. He asked me what to do. I recommended that he recite Sutras as a way of transferring merit to his deceased friend. Now, you may ask, 'Is sitting meditation helpful for others?' It is helpful, but it is not as direct as Sutra recitation.

When a Sutra is recited, the power of Buddhadharma calls back the deceased so that he or she can benefit from listening to the Buddhadharma. If the deceased cannot come back, numerous sentient beings always gather when Sutras are recited, and it is they who benefit from listening to Buddhadharma. Because they benefit, the one who passed away also benefits.

The Brahmajala Sutra says that Bodhisattvas should explain the Mahayana Sutras and Vinaya for the sake of sentient beings whenever someone is seriously ill, and on the day when a family member, spiritual advisor or dharma master passes away. At the time of passing, and for three to seven weeks afterward, the practitioner should have a master expound the Sutras, and should himself recite sutras and make offerings, in order to benefit the deceased.

Finally, we recite the Sutras hoping to benefit sentient beings directly so that they generate Bodhi mind, the altruistic mind of enlightenment, and attain Buddhahood.

如是我聞。

"Thus have I heard"

Beyond

*beyond words
sometimes too numerous
at other times not enough*

*beyond time
beyond its dynamics,
divisibility
into what was
into what is.*

*beyond forgetfulness
beyond the danger
of taking the past for the present
illusion for reality.*

*beyond the mind
feeding on words, concepts,
beyond imagination
pulsating with images, dreams,
beyond emotion, uncertain, fecund*

*beyond escape,
beyond departure
beyond everything*

there is everything.

Magdalena Babdyga
Warsaw

Greek Flavoured Ch'an

David Fontana

Some years ago, when I was younger and cleverer than I am now, I would have known exactly what to write when invited to contribute an article on Ch'an.

As it is, I thought to write of counselling and psychotherapy, for there is no doubt that the Buddha dispensed a powerful medicine, strong enough to quench the fever in this world and the next; to examine the nature of what arises, moment by moment, to understand becoming and passing away, what better remedy? But I have written about that before, and to write about it again is to cling to insights from the past.

Removing the safe limits of the past reveals the problem of the present. What is there to say about the now of Ch'an? Ch'an is great faith and great resolution, but it is also great questioning - great doubt, great spirit of enquiry. So in writing of Ch'an I must write of questions and not answers, uncertainty not certainty. Ch'an presents its great doubt in the form of the koan, the riddle that nags away at the mind, that laughs, teases, disquiets, infuriates, liberates. Unlike other forms of meditation, the koan is a test, but one that gives no clue to what happens if you live and die without solutions. Would that be failure? If so, who is it who fails and who is it who judges it as failure? And who is it who cares whether the world falls apart or stays in one place?

Master Puyan Duan-an of Dasheng Mountain, said:

You should not sit preserving empty stillness without contemplating a koan. You should not sit mindful of the koan without doubting it.

I shall illustrate my own doubt by writing of a journey, or rather of several journeys, that John Crook and I made; first on a frail, wind-buffed plane across the January Aegean to the Greek island of Santorini, split once by a mighty volcano and still full of a magic strange as the black dust that shadows the rocks around the bay; and then inland from Athens through the purple hills to Delphi, the sanctuary of Apollo; and, in another incarnation, through the night-time, snow-capped mountains and next day across the plains of Arcadi towards Mani and a distant sea; and later still to the plains of Sparta and a ruined city rising steeply on a hillside, each step of our climb through its empty streets and silent churches an initiation into the mysteries of presence.

Maybe it is a journey that John and I each took in our own minds, and I remember best only those parts of it we shared. No matter. For in each moment the koan arose, at times demanding an urgent answer, at others settling into a peaceful murmur, yet always with a kind of troubled joy that mirrored the enchantment of those journeys into the magic whisper that is Greece.

D. T. Suzuki, that wise, gentle, nail-hard teacher says that the koan is a pointer that functions in two directions, firstly to push the intellect and let it see there is a realm into which as such it can never enter, and secondly to effect the maturity of Zen consciousness which eventually breaks out into a state of satori.

... in the first direction there takes place what has been called 'searching and contriving'. Instead of the intellect, which taken by itself forms only a part of our being, the entire personality, mind and body, is thrown out into the solution of the koan.

So the 'searching and contriving' come first. There is no point in abandoning the intellect all at once, since it also is part of the mind, awaiting transformation. My own koan, 'Why did Bodhidharma come from the West?' has provided me with intellectual answers in plenty, some trivial, some maddening, some supplying what feel like genuine insights into the bodhisattva mind, but all of them ultimately intrusive and leading back to the beginning.

Early in our journeyings, the mystic presence of Greece took hold of my koan and fashioned it into 'Why did John and I come from the West?', a question which aroused a train of cause and effect running back into beginningless time. If certain ancestors, millennia ago, had not escaped the clutches of sabre-toothed tigers there would have been no coming or going for either of us. So the koan aroused gratitude for those long dead ancestors, whose struggle for survival enabled us one day to walk the dusty roads of Greece. In that sense, everyone who ever lived has indeed been our parent.

Yet at other times the koan dissolved into a simple sense of *nowness*. There was nothing but this *now* that embraced the koan, the blue dome of the sky, the green leaves in the wind, John, myself, so that I wanted to sing with a quiet joy. Once, on a hill above Athens, we looked down on the smudge of the polluted city, and yet saw the pristine whiteness of the Parthenon, elevated above the grime, sparkling in the sunlight; and past and present fell away to be replaced by two men standing silent in the pure January day.

Greece breathes a very special kind of energy into John. Speaking the language, steeped in its thoughts and its history, Greece is his second home and he initiates one gently into his vision. In the Agora he walks where Socrates walked, and speaks snatches of the dialogues as if they are his own. And Socrates, the old Greek Ch'an master, rises from the stones, links arms, and in a whisper speaks of the fabled road to Eleusis and of the mysteries enacted there that linger in the blood.

Once we spent the night in a cottage borrowed from friends, perched above a winter village deserted as itself and with a garden looking across the Mani to a moonlit sea, and prised away at my koan and at a mind that grasped it too tightly.

"You must," said John, "*become* Bodhidharma in order to answer that koan. You must get inside his mind."

"Or at least inside the mind of the monk who first asked the question?"

"That too."

"How?"

"Yours is a very hard koan, a very advanced koan".

"My fault. I chose it years ago."

"Why not something simpler?" asked John.

"Shih-fu told me I must keep asking 'Why, why?', and keep that 'why?' always in place."

"Yes. But I think you could also keep asking 'what?' I'm sure you would find that helpful."

What a clever trick the koan is! John and I sat late at our supper, mulling over a question to which frail scholarship can give no answer. How full of contradictions and paradoxes Ch'an is, always

tempting, prodding, nudging the mind: 'Look ... tell me what you see... show me what you see... , now don't tell me, don't show me, Just *see*... now tell me what you see...' And so it goes on, until the questions suddenly stop...

Master Gaofeng Yuanmiao told his pupil Qiong:

(Meditate continuously) twenty-four hours a day and do not let there be any interruption. Arise long before dawn, gather your koan and put it in front of you... never depart from the koan. Carry on like this all through the day and through the night. All those who fuse themselves into one whole (with the koan) will surely develop illumination.

On another occasion, walking through the ruins at ancient Olympus, where the games were a sacred ritual for nearly 1,000 years and the victors crowned with laurels from the Hill of Cronus, John spoke to me of the 'spirit of place', that indefinable sense of oneness with woods and fields and stones and with the people who across the centuries lived in that spot and loved what they saw. We know indeed there are no boundaries between us and the world. The materials of which we are made are no different from those in the earth around us. The thoughts in our heads belong half to others. The air in our lungs is taken from and given back to the world at every breath. Our genes are those of our forebears, our beliefs are handed down to us, our lives are dependent upon others. And yet we act and think as if we are separate, like dewdrops strung on the web of existence.

Ch'an reminds us of our wholeness, our unity, our non-separation. The dewdrops, the web itself are one, not through loss of individuality but through an absence of opposition between unity and individuality. In the Prajnaparamita the Buddha says of the Bodhisattva:

He does not seize on annihilationist views; for all dharmas are absolutely unproduced and therefore no dharma is ever annihilated. He does not seize on eternalist views; because dharmas are not produced, and there is neither eternity nor annihilation.

The mind grasps haltingly after such a truth, accepts its logic but cannot live it. Yet in those moments where one senses the spirit of place, whether at Olympus with its ghosts or in a walk to the postbox in the next street, the truth arises from within ourselves, and we are content.

Ch'an does not seek to take us to exalted states. It urges us to see where we are and what we are now. Time is the strangest of all concepts, stretching from the past to the future, yet never with a present we can grasp. Ch'an asks us to forget this crazy business of time, and think only of now, the eternal now. It tells us to refrain from stirring the mind with bittersweet thoughts of the past, with endless plans for the future, with a muddled chain of contriving and wishing that obscures what it is to be ourselves. It bids us look at this strangest yet simplest of all things, this being alive. It urges us to examine what it is to wake each morning and become aware of returning thoughts and sounds and colours. 'Look around you', says Ch'an, 'see for yourself; only you can experience it; you won't find the answer in other men's science; but take care - if you blink you'll miss it'.

Our journeyings in Greece took us to Delphi. The sanctuary of Apollo rises in a natural sweep of the hills facing the early morning sun, and surprises the traveller on the road below. There for centuries the oracle solved the puzzles of men, and once named Socrates as the wisest in all Athens because he alone knew that he did not know. Delphi, friendly in its stillness, and even in its ruins able to answer questions.

"Why did I come from the West?"

“Look within.”

“How should I look?”

“First see who asks the question”.

Our Greek friends watched in amusement as the two strange Englishmen picked their entranced path through those marvellous stones, listening to still voices, feeling the spirit of place, awakening the old gods to speak again of Ch'an.

On another occasion, at the foot of a steep hill miles from a town, John stopped the car to pick up an elderly countrywoman bent by the weight of heavy baskets, translating for me in great delight her stream of thanks: ‘Ah the kind gentlemen, there she was at the foot of the hill, wondering how she was going to climb up to her home, the baskets so heavy and she not so young, and surely the Virgin, the good mother of God was taking care of her that day, and would bless the gentlemen for their kindness’. How many journeys up that steep hill with her baskets and no car in sight, and yet one day the English gentlemen came by! Her blessings and those of the Mother of God fell on willing ears, and in that moment our reason for coming from the West stood clear and uncomplicated.

Elsewhere, there was a different kind of magic. Since I heard their names at school, the plains of Arcadi and the plains of Sparta have stirred in my mind an equal excitement. When we drove out of the hills and saw Arcadi before us it was no disappointment. I had long learnt not to expect the lush green woodlands and fields that we wrongly dub Arcadian. Arcadi is a dry, sunburnt place, studded with scrub and small olive trees, but to the Greeks, accustomed to the hard life of the mountains, it looked a demi-Paradise, and I saw it as they saw it, and the excitement of my boyhood was not disappointed. In Ch'an, once illumination is reached, mountains and rivers are once more mountains and rivers. On seeing Arcadi I was unsure whether this was the first or the last stage of seeing, but the experience brought together two parts of one whole, the plains and whatever ‘I’ it was who looked out over them.

In the Pratyutpannasamadhi Sutra the Buddha said:

This triple world exists only because of the mind. According to one's own thoughts one sees oneself in one's own mind... All things have no reality in themselves, they take their rise owing to thought and laws of origination. When that which is thought vanishes, the thinking one himself vanishes... all the Bodhisattvas by means of this Samadhi attained great enlightenment.

So Arcadi was seen in direct contemplation, without the thinking that gives it a separate existence. And so it was with Sparta. We came upon it after a bone-chilling night in a small unheated guesthouse, the freezing air pouring down on us from the mountains. But in the morning there was a quiet mist rolling away in the sun, and we breakfasted in a white-tabled cafe with an antique stove, in the company of three workmen who glanced sideways at us with curiosity and powerful Spartan faces. And afterwards, a climb through the ruins of Mystras, ancient capital of the Byzantine Empire. Out of season, we had the city to ourselves. Again the spirit of place, and eye-catching murals on crumbling church walls.

John felt it most, standing transfixed before a painting, medieval yet abruptly modern in style, of Christ in the manger with a blue-mantled virgin reclining full length beside him, her face turned away... In the same church my eye was caught by a frosted glass door to a storeroom, incongruous

and functional, and the memory of a dream which seemed to foretell that moment of seeing rose abruptly from the unconscious and kept me in turn transfixed.

Higher up in the city, we passed the houses of nobles, and climbed to the second floor of the largest. From the upper chamber we stepped out onto a balcony supported beneath by decorative arches, and looked over Sparta below. The mist had faded by then, and the plains were filled with a golden light.

How often the family who built and took pride in that house, stone upon stone, must have stood in that same spot and watched morning and night-time. Ch'an teaches that life and death are the same. In the Prajnaparamita Subhuti says, 'That form which is like a dream, or an echo, a mock show, a mirage, a reflection in the water, an apparition, that form is neither bound nor freed'. Again the spirit of place, and the long dead, still living ghosts who shared the balcony with us.

Higher still there was a monastery, lovingly restored, with quiet nuns in the shadows of a small courtyard, and a living church where we sat on old high-backed seats and meditated in the dusty stillness. The Ch'an doctrine of no mind. No thinker only thoughts, no meditator only meditation. Another trick, sly and helpful. 'Don't you see? Where are you looking? Who is that looks? Who is it behind the looker? The wooden man sings and the stone woman dances. Don't you hear them? Very well, who is it who does not see, does not hear? Who is it? And why does he not see and hear?' Why why why? Why did Bodhidharma come? Three years in the journeying, and then nine years sitting before his wall. And then, before he died, the homesickness for India. And after death, the solitary walker sighted on a high mountain pass, one sandle in his hand, treading the long road back to India. And when the news reached China, the opening up of Bodhidharma's tomb, empty but for a sandal. Oh I could weep.

And in that quiet church Christ on the cross, mother blessing, another hint, another divinity, another Buddha.

Without the shedding of blood, there can be no remission of sins. Without the loss of that tough sculpted ego we are stuck forever where we are, no ears that listen, no eyes that see...

Master Liaoyo of Broken Cliff said:

If you want to transcend the ordinary and enter sage-hood, and forever shed sensory afflictions, you must strip off your skin and change your bones... After annihilation you are re-born; it is like flames flaring up in the cold ashes, like a dead tree blooming again. How could this be easy to conceive of?

Now back to the beginning, and that strange journey to the isle of Santorini. Coming in to land, our fragile plane was caught by the wind, and thrown sideways in abrupt uncertainty. Later, a taxi drove us up the hill and left us before an old man watching from a high white wall. In answer to John's request for a room he replied with grave dignity, 'Well then come with me...'

And what a room, built like all of Santorini into the cliff, with a window out to sea. And afterwards a walk bent double in the wind-racked night along the cliff and down the hill past quiet magical houses and narrow winding paths. Next morning, in the crystal light, the volcano in the bay that blew Santorini apart in a skyburst rage those centuries ago. And then we saw more ruins, a city uncovered from volcanic dust, with twisting streets and a vase of flowers where the architect reclaiming it from the vulcan god fell cruelly to his death. Then a small path from the ruins to a quiet restaurant, deserted out of season, where we ate with the clear Aegean at our feet, and men

beside us mending their nets in the clarity of the moment and the blessing of Homer's wine-dark sea.

Ch'an offers us Ch'an masters to help us on our journeys. In one of his commentaries to the Hekiganroku, Katsuki Sekida writes that:

Children enjoy their positive Samadhi instinctively, and so do horses and cows, standing peacefully in the evening sun. But there is a special quality about the positive samadhi of a mature master, founded as it is on his laboriously achieved absolute samadhi. It has something of the severity and intensity of the high mountains. However, this is not to say that the master may not sometimes have a pleasant chat with you...

The Hekiganroku, the Mumonkan and other collections of koans are full of the master's pleasant chats to his pupils. When Suriyo approached Baso and asked him why Bodhidharma came from the West, Baso struck him down. At other times the pleasant chat takes the form of a mondo. The student asks a question, the master answers, but never in the region of concrete thinking or abstraction, and usually the exchange ends with the master's enigmatic statement. Joshu asked Nansen:

"What is the Way?"

Nansen replied, "Your everyday mind is the Way".

"Do we need any special conducting or not?"

"No, when we turn towards it we turn away from it."

"But if we do not need special conducting, how do we find the Way?"

"The Way transcends both knowledge and no-knowledge. Knowledge is illusion, no-knowledge is indifference. When you really arrive at the point where not a shadow of doubt is possible, it is like vastness of space, empty and infinitely expanding. You have no need either to affirm or negate."

Attaining enlightenment when her bamboo pail broke in the moonlight, the nun Chiyono's pleasant chat became a poem:

*This way and that way
I tried to keep the pail together
Hoping the weak bamboo
Would never break
Suddenly the bottom fell out:
No more water:
No more moon in the water:
Emptiness in my hand!*

On one of our journeys, John and I drove to a cottage in the Mani, the southern tip of Greece, reached through winter-empty towns where we peered through silent windows. And in the Mani there was Chiyono's moon, secure in the vastness of the silver sea, emptiness in the hand. In the Mani there are many ruined towers, where families once kept themselves secure in a brutal lawless land. Now old women shake the olives from the trees, and catch them in large squares of cloth under the branches. The Mani is a country of earth tremors, of wild empty spaces, of few houses

and no young people. Clear as Chiyono's moon is the memory of how the earth and sea and sky meet together there, and of rocky headlands and narrow open roads. On one such road we came again upon the spirit of place, a small convent, isolated but safe under the brow of a hill, where a nun with a damaged wrist asked shyly if we were doctors of medicine, because the sisters were too poor to call the doctor from the town. But deepest of all is the memory of John securing the cottage gate behind us for the final time, and quoting as he closed the latch the last ox-herding picture:

*His garden gate is closed.
However hard you look
You will not find him there.
He is down in the market place,
teaching wine-bibbers and fishmongers
The ways of the Buddha.*

And of course memories of John himself, magical speaker, each word clear and compassionate as a scalpel, seabirds flying above the headland in a darkening sky. Greece and the Maenllwyd. Winter nights and dark mornings. Clap your morning boards John, in the mud and the soft rain of a new Welsh day. And in between the claps, what dreams to trouble and inspire!

'Why did Bodhidharma come from the West?' The answer is given. The Cyprus tree in the garden; sitting long and growing tired; nothing better to do; inevitable. What else? Yet once, in a different time and place, John looking through the window to where a real tree bent before the wind, said only "No idea".

Ah yes, that too.

Sitting in no-sense

Eric Rommeluere

Eric Rommeluere (b 1960) has practised Zen since 1978. He is the author of a collection of major Zen texts entitled 'Les Fleurs du Vide' (Paris, Grasset 1995), which he translated directly from the Chinese or Japanese. Recently he published 'Guide du Zen' (Paris, Hachette 1997) detailing all the Zen groups currently active worldwide. John Crook met and stayed with Eric in May 1997 at the first meeting of the Groupe de Recherches et d'Etudes sur le Zen (GREZ) of the Université Bouddhique Européene, 4 place Albert-Londres 75013, Paris, a francophone group concerned with the development of Zen in the West and of which Eric is a leading member. Eric Rommeluere has kindly agreed to join the Advisory Board of the Western Ch'an Fellowship and we are grateful to him for allowing us to present the following text¹ to our readers.

Reality does not exist. There is only the reality of words. When we are born, we are born into words not into the world. Words are the supports on which our world rests; the world such as I create by words. In itself the world is neither blue, nor yellow, nor red, nor black, high, low, large, small. Even so, without words we cannot get around in our world. Without words all would be mere chaos and our being without structure. You tell me "This table is blue": I understand what you are saying, but what is it that I really know of this table? Absolutely nothing.

We exist only because there are words. We are not only made up of flesh and blood but of words and yet again words. But these words which are for us the source of life are at the same time the origin of our sufferings. Herein lies the whole paradox of human life.

Words lie at the centre of all our desires; in particular those words about the space between birth and death being sometimes bound, sometimes infinite; yet we all advance inexorably on the path leading from birth to death. What is this road? With birth, words are born. Consciousness is born from words. Existence is born from consciousness. Discrimination arises with existence. Contradiction is born from discrimination and from this arises suffering, the path at every moment channelled by words.

To practice Buddhism, is to walk consciously along the path from birth to death. To study Buddhism is to ask oneself how to live in this world of birth and death; it is to ask how to live with words.

In Zen, we have a marvellous method for interrupting all these mental wanderings. It is called the 'just-sitting' meditation. It consists precisely in forgetting words. What are we doing? Sitting correctly, we practise nothing, we contemplate nothing, we realise nothing.

¹Colophon. This text was written by Eric Rommeluere in 1993 and revised by him in 1995. It was translated from the French for New Ch'an Forum by John Crook in March 1998. (Copyright Eric Rommeluere)

Sitting correctly we do not distinguish anything, we discern nothing and we do not judge anything.

Master Dogen has written in his 'Fukanzazengi': *'Think neither of good nor of evil, make no distinction between the true and the false. Stop the agitation of the mind and cease considering anything.'*

The meditative consciousness is then no longer in the domain of words. We do nothing other than to become free from words. The words may arise but they no longer form sentences. Who therefore can be set in chains by them?

In abandoning words in this way 'no-sense' makes a brusque irruption into our life. One cannot get hold of anything. One cannot understand anything. Nothing can be caught hold of. Although everything is before one's eyes, there is nothing one can say, there is nothing to say. Consciousness is needle-sharp but words find no place there.

What to make of this opening without meaning. Some, having known it, close it down again. Others enlarge it again and again pleasurably. What to make of this breach? Absolutely nothing. Through it we dance over our illusions. We jump over all our suffering.

The absence of 'Why?' is the essence of our meditation. If we add a 'Why?' to this practice, we give it a sense. And by this sense we sully our meditation.

Those who come to sit are searching for an answer through sitting. Some speak of well-being, of health, of enlightenment. Some feel the effects of it, others wake up, yet all of this remains only construction in words. After all, it is only perpetuating in a happy fashion the comings and goings of the illusory world. Most stay stupefied by not finding a response to their questions. They do not understand that to sit in this way is to stop all questioning. And so they quickly close the gap which they have opened. How could one find an answer there?

Others continue to practice, affirming that they practice without a goal. But behind this goal-less activity hides the meaning which their unconscious conceals. In coming to sit, each one of us has brought our own motivation. We need to know this, to elucidate it, to throw it away, at last to pass the door opening on pure meditation. If our motivation remains unconscious this door is more difficult to pass. We are still taken up with hidden memories or with our buried knots. The practice of meditation is sometimes only a manifestation of our neuroses. All our interior discourse halts us before this door. In attempting to pass through it we must abandon all the 'whys', even the idea of 'goallessness' and penetrate deeply into the obscurity of no-sense. There is no meaning to this practice. That is the secret of Zen. In sitting one is as if dumb with nothing to say, as if deaf with nothing to hear, like an idiot understanding nothing. Of what use is a fan in winter?

There are many ways of acting in this world. In Buddhism we distinguish between actions of the body, of the mind and of speech. They are all accomplished through words. All such activity carries meanings that sustain the experience of being. We, who possess

consciousness, search for the meaning of being. Such is the nature of humanity, the way we travel the road from birth to death. It is why we search for happiness and self understanding. The practice of Buddhism as a response to such questions is to continue living in the illusory domain of human creativity.

We have this odd activity we call meditation. There are many ways of sitting in meditation and everyone tries them out as they wish. Here is bodily sitting; that is rest. There is the sitting of the mind; that is tranquillity. There is a sitting where the body lets go of the mind; that's torpidity. There is a sitting where the mind abandons the body; that's agitation. Calmness is only agitation at point zero, not its transcendence. All these ways of sitting, even happiness and contentment, are the simple equilibria of antagonistic forces rather than their suppression. All such states succeed one another in meditation just as day follows night.

Even so, in the centre of all such sitting appears the sitting where body and mind let go of themselves, where calm and agitation come to an end and where a consciousness that transcends sitting comes into being; this we call 'just-sitting'.

A master once said '*Zazen is not a human creation.*' In meditation we eventually stop creating anything. With this body and mind we let go of body and mind. Although body and mind continue their life of body and mind, consciousness itself apprehends the emptiness of body and mind. By this, in an instant, we leap over all our creations stopping in one blow the cycle of our mental transmigrations.

Emperor Wu of Liang asked Great Master Bodhidharma, "What is the supreme principle of the sacred teaching?" Bodhidharma replied, "Emptiness and nothing holy." The Emperor asked, "Who then stands before me?" Bodhidharma replied, "I do not know."

This not-knowing has always been transmitted and preserved as the secret of Zen. Face to the wall, one looks at nothing, one contemplates nothing. Who is there then before us? But the words have fallen away and abandoned us.

My father's hands

Carol Evans

I had always loved my father's hands. They seemed to be the only part of him I could love in safety.

I could love them in secret and in silence and my mother would never know. I could look at them when she was out of the room, cooking in the kitchen, banging the pots and pans as she worked.

She was an angry woman who had been forced to marry my father when she was only twenty years old because he had made her pregnant. She had never forgiven him, nor those who made them get married. She once confided in me: "There was someone else I liked at the time, more than your father."

My two sisters and I spent most of our childhood in an atmosphere of simmering resentment, which seemed to have an unspoken law:

'Thou shalt not love thy father, nor get to know him, nor have any relationship with him.'

But I disobeyed her and loved him in secret; through his hands.

He was not a tall man, or a heavy man - just 5ft 7in, weighing an unfluctuating 9 stone all his life, except when he died of cancer at the age of sixty-nine.

He was sinewy and lithe, like the greyhounds raced by the working men in our neighbourhood on the racecourse beyond the housing estates. But his hands were large, strong and square, with tapering fingers and smooth horn-hard rounded finger nails.

They were hands that worked in all weathers: night shift, day shift; carrying loads, lifting crates, boxes; working on the cargoes from the huge ships that came and went at Swansea docks.

He worked until his hands were cracked and chapped by cold, wind and rain, filthy from handling cargoes of pig iron or coal; brown and gnarled from the sun in summer.

I was fascinated by those hands and wanted to hold them; examine them; play with them; longing to feel their rough texture and warmth holding mine. But I feared my mother's disapproval, and the impulse always froze before I could reach out to him.

When I was about 7 or 8, I noticed that my hands were like his; I had inherited large, strong hands - unexpected on a thin little girl, and I felt pleased that they were not like my mother's hands - small, plump, soft.

I never sat on my father's lap, or played with him, or went out with him. But once a week, on a Sunday evening, my mother would wash my hair and my father would dry it. I would sit on the

floor in front of the open coal fire, between his knees, back to him and facing the blaze, and he would rub my wet hair with a towel that he'd just held to warm in front of the flames.

I would feel the firm, warm weight of his hands through the towel, as my head was jogged gently back and forth by their vigorous rubbing.

Those Sunday evenings were amongst the rare times in my childhood when I felt secure and at ease, my head held in large, strong hands while the long fair hair dried.

By the time my mother was fifty, she had begun to soften a little. Her lifetime's burden of making ends meet was lifted now her daughters had left home. She was a voracious reader, and even wrote poems and stories from time to time. She won prizes for recipes that she sent to women's magazines, and joined a writers' circle at the local library.

Occasionally when I came home on an unexpected visit, I would find the two of them seated together on a sofa, my father holding my mother's small stockinged feet in his hands.

In the mid-sixties they bought a small black and white television set and avidly watched University Challenge every Sunday, taking an almost parental interest in the brilliant youngsters who'd enjoyed the kind of education of which they themselves had been deprived.

The times when my mother shared with me the bitterness of her life became fewer. There were even times when I dared to believe that she was content.

At sixty my father retired from the docks after forty years of working there. There was no retirement ceremony; no lump sum or golden handshake. He went down to the call on a cold Friday morning in December, worked his last day, and became a free man. Free to read his *Daily Mirror* all morning and his *Swansea Evening Post* all evening; to call at the bookie's a couple of times a week and to drink his pints and smoke his Woodbine at the Labour Club when his meagre pension ran to it.

The following June 12th was my father's 61st birthday, and my mother rang me a week before and asked if I would club together with her to buy my father a gold wrist watch. 'I know he always wanted one', was her only comment.

We chose him a fine looking gold watch with a black crocodile strap and presented it to him on his birthday.

It was as if my mother, at last, was feeling for him, in his final years, something other than contempt.

The handsome gold wrist watch set between the protuberant bones of his thin wrists, looked incongruous so close to his rough, brown labourer's hands.

One day, not long after receiving the gold watch, he confided in me, giving me one of his rare shy smiles.

"When I look down at the arm of the chair and see a hand with a gold wrist watch on it, I feel a shock; and for a minute it seems as if the hand belongs to someone else."

Shifting shit

Ann Dickman

There seems to be a question: 'Can I be enlightened if I'm not a monk/nun?' Possibly not often for lay people, but can Buddhist teachings and practice improve the quality of our lives - the answer is a resounding 'Yes'.

A lay practitioner is constantly faced with personal obstacles, disagreements, tensions and difficulties which can lead to days and weeks of self analysis or can be ridden over like a boat in a rough sea. One is thrown about, but who is feeling tossed? The best sailor is the silent, empty, nothing-mind.

Many writings are by monks rather than by nuns and by celibates rather than parents. My early working life was a doddle compared with the first year with my first child. A breast-feeding baby soon trims your ego into shape. Juggling three children, a husband and a part-time job demands a rigorous timetable and impeccable efficiency. For ten years or so there is not a minute when it is not necessary to attend to someone's needs. Before the modern disposable nappies arrived the washing produced by three children under three and a half was monumental. This is excellent training for mindfulness probably exceeding that of many monasteries but where are the women teachers from this tradition? Probably in the playground.

Teenagers demand a greater level of tolerance as they constantly test their parents; this can be best handled by attention and unconditional love. The nothing-mind is with each incident or feeling, exploring it in sensuous detail and moving on to the next or acting as is necessary. I was caring for animals, many of whom were sick, juggling their needs for medicine with the volume and quality of their food. The shit had to be shifted daily. But who is it that looks at the eye of a horse or calf or rabbit and knows what it needs; this is the nothing mind and a gut feeling.

So what is this intuitive gut feeling and how does it relate to the true self? It seems that intuition is the thin edge of the centre hidden behind the nothing-mind but it is difficult to hear because of the deafening din of the thinking mind. But with a little sitting practice and sufficient tiredness a knowingness grows during the shit shifting. Gradually things get done well and life flows smoothly.

But this still leaves 'me' living life and dancing with it but not being part of it. There is still a duality. Nothing mind may have little ego left but there is still enough to shriek in a crisis. There is still a final step. Sitting alertly, working alertly and revelling in the sharpness and clarity of life makes this all quality time. Life can be joyful and lifted to ecstasy by music and paintings. But there is still the feeling of isolation and separation and this is where Life Roshi takes a hand. This is often the point where illness, disaster, bereavement or some other crisis tips the balance and one must face one's karma. Each of us has some particular problem which recurs through each decade and challenges us at the roots of our being. It is the facing of our own unique problem which opens the door of loving mind.

So perhaps lay people, and especially lay women, need a different teaching and a different sangha from that designed by monks. A weekend for mothers, who are normally exhausted, could be fruitful if they can have a good sleep and then watch their minds. Older people are at a stage of their lives where death may have tapped them on the shoulder but may be physically unable to withstand the rigours of retreats designed for younger folk. The demands of a terminally ill partner make inroads in the ego and teaching could be very fruitful but is unavailable at this time. Books are our modern refuge but the understanding of Buddhism is so contrary to our modern ethos that a perceptive teacher is needed.

The loving mind is an extension of the nothing mind where every object, person, feeling is so whole and vivid for the moment one perceives it that there is no perceiver. The objects in the world *are* the world; there is no-one looking. As these objects appear they can be attended with absolute concentration to the momentary needs, with total loving attention. A person, a plant or a stone changes as a photograph changes from black and white to colour and finally to a holographic image. One is the world of the hologram and no longer alienated. The separation was only in the mind. The gut feeling is the whole world and there is no more shit to shift. There is no self to be true.

Visiting mother

*Copper whispers blowing in the wind,
beech leaves chase the rough grasses down the field.
At ninety two, I ask myself,
will she see another spring?*

*She rests there, quiet, her busy conversation gone,
anxieties softened now in forgetfulness of age.
Beside her in the garden, dozing off,
I see her smiling in a ray of autumn sun.*

*She set my character in grooves
so like her own, wakeful mornings worrying;
skilled diplomacy; collusion
in the many faces of a smile; all silent now.*

Will she see another spring?

*Falling like leaves - the boxed up photographs,
cracked vases and old time
letters carefully stored away
in chests of drawers, yellowing archives*

*only she remembers, rarely now recalls;
ancient faces; raucous tones; the quarrelling;
the tears behind the racks of bathroom towels;
not her mother, remembered gentle granny her support.*

And will she see another spring?

*Suddenly, imagining her presence gone,
the house falls empty, only paper memories remain.
She sits here smiling in the autumn sun
Oh dear - such sadness at your gratitude for my having come.*

JHC

1997

Hi There!

*Who are you?
You pretend to not know.
Of course you know who you are!
It is you, holding the page
reading the marks on this piece of paper.*

*It is you, reading my mind
with the sound of your voice.*

*And who am I?
I am you.
Sharing thought.
EVERYTHING .*

*You, in manifestation,
are on the frontier
of your/self.*

*You will see yourself,
out there,
in the world,
doing so many things.*

Make them all wonderful things.

*Be kind to the others.
your other selves
- the rest of you.
For we are One.
Good bye for NOW.*

Love.

Ryder Lake

The bright field ploughed

Rosalind Cuthbert

'Ploughing the Bright Field' was the title of an exhibition of contemporary Buddhist art, held at the Create Centre, Bristol, in November 1997.

The exhibition attracted around 500 visitors during a fortnight. It showed the work of 20 artists from all over the country. Most were professional artists whose work is either partly or wholly inspired by Buddhist practice. A few were artists whose work is part of a process of self-enquiry, not intended for sale. I am a self-employed artist and have been involved in meditation for about nine years, practising with the Bristol Ch'an Group.

My idea for the exhibition was to gather together artists working in their own contemporary manner rather than those adhering to traditional forms such as Thangka painting. I could already count several of these among my friends and acquaintances and so suspected that it might be a line worth following. I duly wrote inviting them to submit slides, and asking them to pass word along to others. I also advertised in South West Arts Newsletter and wrote to several Buddhist organisations, to stimulate response from further afield.

The exhibition failed to win a grant and by the end of June had only raised £800 in private sponsorship money. I realised it would have to pay for itself somehow and, in discussion with the Bristol Ch'an Group, I decided to organise a poetry reading and a day of talks. I reckoned on needing to raise an absolute minimum of £2000 if the project was to be adequately publicised and a reasonable catalogue produced.

The poetry reading was given by four Buddhist poets: John Crook, James Crowden, Julia Lawless and Ken Jones. James Monks read for Ken who couldn't make it to the preview, but who did drive down from North Wales to give a talk on 'Engaged Buddhism' two weeks later. Other speakers were Peter Hardie, who gave an illustrated talk entitled 'The Diamond Thunderbolt - Buddhist Tantric Art in China' and Ninchen Khandro, a charming nun from Samye Ling in Scotland who drove all the way down to speak to us about the Holy Island project. The talks were on quite disparate aspects of Buddhist Art and Practice, but I guess there was something for everyone! The day passed very well and, I hope, stimulated discussion. It certainly spread good feeling and brought Buddhists and Buddhist sympathisers together in a creative way.

By early September I had only a dozen or so artists. Then, during September the rush started and my artists' list grew to twenty. In October I had to turn away four more who came forward too late. I was very pleased to have attracted so many artists and to think that this exhibition would be an opportunity - the first of its kind as far as I knew - for artists with a Buddhist orientation to make contact with one another, and to discover, perhaps, that collectively they had a voice with a unique and special sound. Luckily, although I was prepared to reject artists on grounds of quality or kind, this was not necessary. I simply selected from the material sent.

There were 12 painters, three sculptors, two photographers and two installation artists. There was collage, mixed media and printmaking, and one of the installations included recorded sound. There was abstract art, figurative art, arte povera (Italian modern art), impermanent installation and somewhat more permanent stone and metal sculpture. One artist was born a Buddhist - a Tibetan called Gonkar Gyatso, currently working as an invited artist at Central St. Martin's School of Art in London. The rest were Westerners.



Meditative dance performance by Parmin and Hao during the preview

The participants were:

Martha Aitchison (Beckenham, Kent) -
painter/printmaker

Bill Ball (Bristol) - painter

Stephen Batchelor (Totnes, Devon) - collage
artist, meditation teacher

Brian Beresford (London) - photographer
(deceased)

Evelyn Body (Thorney, Somerset) - sculptor

Michael Briar (Cornwall) - painter/printmaker

Ann Brown (Cambridge) - painter

Vanessa Cecil (Exeter) - painter

Rosalind Cuthbert (Winscombe, North Somerset)
- painter

Chris Dunseath (Hinton St. George, Somerset) -
sculptor

Mary Edmond (Edinburgh) - painter

Gonkar Gyatso (London) - painter

Dennis Hawkins (Repton, Derbyshire) - painter

Elizabeth Hunter (Axbridge, Somerset) - painter

Denny Long (Bristol) - multimedia artist, Zen
nun

Tim Malyon (Tiverton, Devon) - photographer,
BBC producer

Sophie Muir (Cornwall) - multimedia artist, T'ai
Chi teacher

Caroline Paine (Bristol) - painter, counsellor

Olivia Sanders (Crewkerne, Somerset) - sculptor

Simon Wickham-Smith (Oxford) - arte povera
artist

The exhibition catalogue devotes a page to most of the artists, including a brief biography, artists' statement and black and white photograph (Copies can be obtained from me price £2.00 + p&p). Telephone 01934-842970. The title of the exhibition was taken from *Cultivating The Empty Field - The Silent Illumination of Zen Master Hongzhi*. (pub. North Point Press. San Francisco.)

Book review

Sacred Hoops

by Phil Jackson

Hyperion, New York, 1995 (obtainable from Sporting Pages, London)

I've been throwing basketballs for almost as long as I have been sitting. At about the same time that I began to sit regularly I started attending a Keep Fit evening class where basketball is the staple diet. So most Thursday evenings will see me along with a group of similarly middle aged and slightly overweight (?) men running up and down a gym trying to throw a ball into a suspended basket.

So what has this to do with Zen?

Firstly, most people understand the idea of the 'zen moment' when some seemingly complex series of actions acquire a unity that is beyond thought and intention. I have experienced some of these moments in several ways and the most usual involves throwing a basketball at a basket and it going in without touching the ring. Hand, eye, ball, air, arch, basket; - hold a gesture of oneness. Then when a ball goes in a basket free of the ring a different sound is produced in the mesh of the basket - a sort of *tccssshhh*. That sound defines the moment, for it somehow always happens in silence; a silence instantly broken by my triumphant "Yeeesssss". When opposites arise the Buddha mind is lost (but 2 points are scored).

And this book? Well, Phil Jackson is the coach of a professional basketball team known as the Chicago Bulls and he is a Zen practitioner. In fact he bases his coaching method on Zen principles, including the practice of meditation. In the book Jackson tells his story of an upbringing in an overbearing Christian home, the disillusionment with its spirituality and the finding of a freedom in Zen practice (Jackson now calls himself a Zen Christian). Following a career as a player Jackson applied his understanding to coaching basketball teams. You can't expect a team to perform in a way that is out of tune with its natural abilities, so empowering individuals - even superstars - to mindfully acknowledge their true abilities and accept what they can and can't change moves any team toward a greater cohesion. Focusing on the awareness of the moment, instilling the notions of selflessness in action and the value of compassion towards fellow players are some of the teachings that Jackson provided for his players.

Somehow I never associated the competitive world of a professional sport with Zen practice but clearing the mind and opening the heart is just as relevant there as anywhere else. In dealing with the high pressure situation of highly paid athletes constantly under media scrutiny Jackson, via his practice has been able to reflect on his own actions, look into his essential nature and find solutions to all sorts of problems - the Tao of Authority leads him.

Zen is life, so why not let the eightfold path lead you to a method of coaching basketball? Even if 'right action means calling it quits' sometimes and it involves losing. As Jackson says, "I used to believe that the day I could accept defeat was the day I would have to give

up my job. But losing is as integral a part of the dance as winning. Buddhism teaches us that by accepting death, you discover life. Similarly, only by acknowledging the possibility of defeat can you fully experience the joy of competition. Our culture would have us believe that being able to accept loss is tantamount to setting yourself up to lose. But not everyone can win all the time; obsessing about winning adds an unnecessary layer of pressure that constricts body and spirit and, ultimately, robs you of the freedom to do your best.”

I've been greatly impressed by Jackson and his approach. As I read the book I kept thinking that it takes great courage to be a practitioner. I don't quite know what that means as it probably is a koan for me. But whatever it is Jackson displays that courage. And a recommendation? Don't read this book unless you are interested in sport for primarily it is the story of how a top basketball team became champions three times coached by a man with a clear and interesting strategy. But if you are interested in basketball and letting your practice guide you, well, when you meet the Buddha on court - throw him a pass!

Eddy 'Slam-dunk' Street

[The editors would welcome further book reviews to be considered for publication in future issues. Please submit your reviews to Pamela Hopkinson, address on page 35]

Retreat report

Learning to be a Zen cook

Pamela Hopkinson

Driving home from the January Mahamudra retreat I thought obsessively about taking up the opportunity to cook. Finally, decided to drop it, not think about for a few days and just see if the situation clarified.

Next morning, the postman knocked and handed over a parcel. It turned out to contain a Christmas present from my brother - a teapot and a book on vegetarian cooking! I decided the direction was clear enough!

The retreat falls into two halves. The first three days. Lots and lots to learn. Forgetting things. Being exhausted. It seemed that there were hundreds of scattered bits of information, hundreds of little tasks that ALL had to be performed to bring a meal together: not just cooking, but all the organising and lighting of lamps and placing of things like ladles, milk bottles etc in the right places at the right time so the right person would grab them.

Tim asked me if I wanted to cook any recipes of my own. I didn't feel any great need to carve my culinary identity onto the retreat. I felt there would be so much to do in the way of learning how things worked - and I was right.

Meditation and absorbing the teachings, I thought, would just have to fit in where they could. Learning about the kitchen was the most important. A lot of the time on my cushion was spent either in exhaustion or twitching mentally with endless lists running through my head.

Tim had planned out a rough programme:

First day (or two) we cook all the meals together.

Second (or third) day, you cook lunch by yourself.

Third (or fourth) day you cook supper by yourself.

Fifth day, I leave you in charge of everything, so that you can get a good idea of a full day's work in the kitchen.

It worked out roughly like that. I began by following Tim around while he told or showed me things, or gave me a specific task to do. The next stage was where I nearly knew what to do, but it wasn't safe to leave me alone for too long. I could cook a dish, but not pull the whole meal together. The first few times I would muddle through, Tim would come in an hour or half hour before the meal was due to be served and then race around doing all the things I had forgotten about, or not got around to.

Day 2 or 3 there was a mini-crisis: we both forgot something (putting out milk? juice?) both of us thinking the other was doing it. I could tell Tim was exasperated by that, because on his own he would not have forgotten it. It was a sort of uneasy time - I didn't know enough to be left alone but I was nearly ready. On the other hand, there are not many jobs two people can do, so we had a day of sort of nearly tripping over one another. Also, I think that was the day I was most tired.

We decided I should do breakfast on my own. We went through all the jobs to be done and I made a list. I did OK but burnt the bottom of the porridge pan. Felt very bad to see Jake scraping away at it

later. (Extremely relieved when he said at the end session how glad he was to be doing washing up because it got him out of chopping veg!)

Then a really wonderful and strange thing began to happen. I was lighting the oil lamps on the refectory altar and I thought, "I'm losing touch with the sacred". From that moment it started to change. I started to fly. Cooking became meditation.



Trainee Zen Cook Pamela Hopkinson

I requested an interview with Simon. I wanted to talk over with him how you could keep in touch with the meditative mind, while learning lots of things, being very organised, very efficient and with a hundred tasks all pressing for space. We talked about the previous Mahamudra retreat and I told him about the Chenresig sadhana. From that developed the notion of being Chenresig cutting the carrots.

Courgettes and carrots with avgolemono and bulgar wheat salad:

I was in the kitchen preparing supper. The house was quiet. I knew how I wanted the vegetables to be - even though I had never made this sauce before. I knew how I wanted the salad to be. There were bowls of prepared veg, chopped garlic. I chose and chopped the herbs I wanted to use. I knew where the oils and other things I needed were. I got them down from the shelves. I was Chenresig preparing supper.

It would be possible to cook for a retreat without any understanding of what people might be going through. Yet it could not mean anything like as much if you didn't have some idea of the powerful feelings people experience on retreat. I found it very moving to see this glum, silent crew shuffle in to the refectory and hope from the bottom of my heart that they would find the food as satisfying and comforting as I always had.

Just as the cook cannot know what is going on for the glum and silent crew who shuffle into the refectory, I suppose no one else can know just what is going on for the cook as grace is said, the offering made and food begins to be served.

The little ritual associated with this developed in strength and potency as the week progressed. Lighting incense in front of Guru Rinpoche's picture became a prayer of thankfulness that the meal was prepared and ready, and a prayer that it would nourish and comfort everybody in the way that they most needed.

Taking the offering out to the Tara statue in the garden became a heartfelt offering of the best that I can be. A private offering of all that had brought the meal to be, while behind me there's the bustle and clatter of everyone being served. It was lovely to walk back into the refectory to all the purposeful bustle and see everyone beginning to eat.

For all but one meditation session I just had to endure a racing mind and endless lists - jobs and ingredients and recipes that simply refused to be corralled. It was a learning process and I accepted it philosophically because the kitchen became a deeper and deeper meditation.

I really began to see that it is possible to work with incredible intensity, yet be in a meditative state. This took me by surprise, and I am very grateful that it happened, because it was wonderful. Despite needing to do a lot of talking to Tim, the pervasive atmosphere of the group meditation carried me along with it.

It was strange being on the other side of the retreat. Tim had to tell me that I had to look around and notice things, not keep eyes down. I loved the few times I joined in with the morning exercises - I missed doing them every day and realised how much I have always enjoyed them, and the little thought for the day that John gives at the end.

In the talk session at the end someone mentioned chanting and I thought "What! You all chanted without me!"

I was thankful that I am confident in my cooking, because things didn't always work out. In some instances, after Tim had told me his way of doing things, I then had to work out my own method before things felt right. Like making bread - I'm not tall enough or strong enough to mix the dough with a spoon, but if I stand on the wooden block and use my hand to mix the dough, it works fine. If I hadn't felt confident of my breadmaking, I might have struggled longer with an unsuitable method.

More people are needed to train as cooks for retreats. Anyone who is interested, and is a confident cook with stamina, can contact Tim Blanc (address on page 36).

DATA PROTECTION ACT - IMPORTANT - PLEASE READ

We keep the NCF mailing list and the WCF membership list on a computer database for administration and mailing purposes. If you do not wish your details to be kept on a computer database then please write to the membership secretary. There are sometimes circumstances where it may be helpful to use this database in other ways, and we would like your permission to do so. We would of course do so sensitively. The circumstances that we have in mind are to contact individuals in a geographical area e.g. (i) to attempt to form the nucleus of a new local meditation group or (ii) to respond to enquirers who wish to discuss Ch'an or WZR or meditation with a contact in their locality. If you would not wish your details to be released in such circumstances then please write to the membership secretary and your wishes will be respected.

'Western Ch'an Fellowship' and 'New Ch'an Forum' information

Following the news of the formation of the Western Ch'an Fellowship in the last issue of NCF, we are pleased to be able to tell you that the WCF is now registered as national charity number 1068637. The WCF is taking over responsibility for New Ch'an Forum from the Bristol Ch'an Group.

This should give us some tax benefits for fundraising, and one way to take advantage of this is through the Charity Cards scheme. You can register for the scheme, which enables taxpayers to make tax efficient donations, by phoning 0800 993311. At this stage our main use for donations is to support retreat attendance by low-waged and unwaged participants by way of a bursary scheme. We also hope to improve facilities e.g. the Maenllwyd library, and perhaps other additions to retreat facilities. We wish to develop local meditation groups and funding may be necessary here. In the longer term we shall develop other projects. If you wish your donation to be earmarked for a particular usage then please say so.

If you wish to apply to become a member of the Western Ch'an Fellowship then please send a stamped addressed envelope to the Membership Secretary, Tim Blanc, who will send you a copy of the constitution and an application form. The constitution places some restrictions on eligibility to apply for fellowship, so not all can be accepted. In brief, you must have attended three retreats at Maenllwyd including one Ch'an Retreat and one Western Zen Retreat (or equivalent elsewhere subject to the approval of the committee), take the three Refuges and follow the basic precepts, follow a regular Buddhist practice, and undertake to continue to attend at least one retreat every three years and to support the Objects of the Charity. These requirements are not meant to be exclusive but are to protect the lineage orientation of the WCF.

WCF meetings. The next AGM will be next February 1999. The next scheduled committee meeting will be 27th September 1998. If you wish any business to be raised at these meetings then please contact one of the committee members.

Contacts for the 'New Ch'an Forum' and 'Western Ch'an Fellowship'

The **WCF Treasurer and Membership Secretary** is Tim Blanc, 26 Hinton Road, Greenbank, Bristol, BS5 6HB, tblanc@globalnet.co.uk

Subscriptions: WCF Fellows receive NCF as a benefit of Fellowship. Others may subscribe at a price of £7.50 per three issues (we aim for three issues per year) by writing with payment enclosed (cheques payable to Western Ch'an Fellowship) to Tim Blanc as above.

The **WCF Secretary**, (and also **NCF picture editor** to whom you can submit artwork, photographs etc for publication) is Simon Child, 24 Woodgate Ave, Bury, LANCS, BL9 7RU, Tel 0161 761 1945, Fax 0161 763 3221 (work), email wcf@child.demon.co.uk

NCF editor is Pamela Hopkinson, 7 Ember Lane, Bonsall, Matlock, Derbyshire, DE4 2AF, Telephone/fax: 01629 823590, email pamela@phopkins.demon.co.uk, to whom you can send any material for possible publication.

Chair of the WCF is Hilary Richards, 8 Park Terrace, The Park, Nottingham, NG1 5DN.

Teacher of the WCF is Dr John Crook, Winterhead Hill Farm, Winscombe, N. Somerset, BS25 1RS. johcro@compuserve.com

The Ch'an Magazine from the Ch'an Center in New York

The Ch'an Center in New York publishes a quarterly magazine, which is available free and which they would like to distribute more widely. It is undergoing a redesign currently so the content and style may change a little, but typically it includes transcribed Dharma talks by Master Sheng-yen, retreat reports, poems, scholarly articles, news and events, etc.

If you would like to be added to the mailing list then write to the Ch'an Center and ask them. The address is as above. They distribute it free of charge but like to receive donations to cover the cost of printing and postage. They estimate the basic costs to them of sending an overseas subscription to be about \$9 to \$10 per year. The cheapest way to send a donation, as long as you trust the postal system, is to obtain some dollar bills from the post office or from Thomas Cook's, and enclose them with your letter. A more secure way, but incurring higher bank charges, would be to send a bankers draft.

Electronic Resources

Ch'an Centre Website:

<http://www.chan1.org/>

Western Ch'an Fellowship Webpages:

<http://child.demon.co.uk/wcf/>
Maintained by Simon Child:
wcf@child.demon.co.uk

WCF-L Ch'an Email List:

Contact John McGowan at:
john@conyboro.demon.co.uk

Retreats at Maenllwyd

Introducing Ch'an Buddhism	October 22 nd - 26 th 1998	Cost £145
Western Zen Retreats	January 7 th - 12 th 1999	Cost £150
	March 11 th - 16 th 1999	
Ch'an Retreats	May 22 nd - 29 th 1999	Cost £190
	June 20 th - 27 th 1999	
Leaders Training Retreat	Feb 11 th - 12 th 1999	
Annual General Meeting of WCF	Feb 13 th 1999	
Mahamudra-Tibetan Zen	Feb 13 th - 18 th 1999	Cost £150
Chanting Retreat.	Jan 16 th - 17 th 1999	

In Bristol. Contact Bristol Ch'an Group: phone Alysun Jones 01934 842017

Ch'an Retreat in Berlin with Shi Fu.	Apr 22 nd - May 2 nd 1999	Contact John.
Retreat with John in Berlin	Nov 21 st - 22 nd 1998,	
in Warsaw	Nov 23 rd - 27 th 1998 and in July 1999	

Please apply to book retreats (non-returnable deposit £50) in writing to Tim Blanc. (Address page 35). If you have not attended a retreat at Maenllwyd before then ask Tim to send you a copy of the full programme which has further important information.

Retreats at the Ch'an Center in New York

For information about retreats in New York contact: Ch'an Meditation Center, Institute of Chung Hwa Buddhist Culture, 90-56 Corona Ave., Elmhurst, New York 11373, USA

Tel: 00 1 718 592 6593 Fax: 00 1 718 592 0717 email dmbany@aol.com www.chan1.org

Journeys 1998-1999

MONASTERIES OF SOUTH CHINA

Nan Hua Si and Yun Men Si, the monasteries of the famous Ch'an Masters Hui Neng and Yun Men. Winter 1999

A remarkable opportunity has arisen not only to visit these most famous of Chinese Ch'an monasteries, now refreshingly refurbished and functional, but also to do a Ch'an retreat in a traditional Ch'an Hall. This invitation arises from John Crook's visit with Yiu Yannang to China in July 1997. Anyone interested should contact John soon so that some idea as to who and how many persons may like to come. Chinese speakers especially welcomed.

This event is at the planning stage and we need an estimate of numbers as soon as possible. We hope to restrict the cost to £2000. Duration around 18-20 days.

Contact John Crook. Winterhead Hill Farm. Shipham. N Somerset. BS25 1RS for information.

SALE OF TAPES

The Bristol Ch'an Group have available a number of spare sets of tapes which have been recorded at Maenllwyd and Bristol Retreats during the last three years. The numbers of tapes are small, but rather than have them collect dust to no good purpose, we are offering them for sale as outlined below. Only complete sets are available as splitting them is not practicable.

If the demand for any given set of tapes is high, we might be able to have further copies made, but that will depend on the level of the demand. Otherwise they will go on a first come, first served basis. However, you will note that we have included John's teachings on the Heart Sutra although we have no spare copies. We felt that this was an important teaching which is central to our practice, and so for this one set of tapes we would probably do a repeat run, even if the numbers requesting it are relatively low.

Copies of all these tapes will shortly be available, to be played with headphones, at the Maenllwyd library. However, they represent many hours of teaching, and on most retreats it would not be possible to do more than listen to a small part of them.

If you would like to buy any of these tapes, please contact:

Mike and Sally Mashedor, 6 Tyne Rd, Bishopston, Bristol. BS7 8EE. Tel 0117 924 8819

Please be sure to give us your telephone number so that we can get in touch with you easily if there are any problems to discuss.

Retreat tapes list

Rev Master Daishin Morgan The Practice of Serene Reflection Meditation and Its Application in Everyday Life. Bristol, March 1998.
3 talks on 3 tapes. Spares 2. Cost £8.50.

Stephen and Martine Batchelor What is This? Bristol, November 1997.
5 talks on 3 tapes. Spares 2. Cost £12.50.

John Crook Ch'an Retreat. August 1997.
8 talks on 4 tapes. Spares 3. Cost £16.50.

James Low Dzogchen Approaches to Quiet Sitting Bristol June 1997.
6 talks on 4 tapes. Spares 4. Cost £18.50.

John Crook Ch'an Retreat May 1997.
6 talks and Morning Service on 6 tapes. Spares 2. Cost £20.00.

Chanting Morning Service and Faith in Mind May 1997.
1 side of 1 tape. Spares 10. Cost £3.00.

Shengpen Hookham Openness, Clarity and Sensitivity Bristol. February 1997.
3 tapes. Spares 1. Cost £10.50.

John Crook Mahamudra Retreat
7 talks on 4 tapes. Spares 1 Cost £15.50.

John Crook The Heart Sutra October 1996.
2 tapes. No spares. Cost £7.00.

New Ch'an Forum readers may be interested in the following courses

SCHUMACHER COLLEGE An International Centre for Ecological Studies

Courses on Buddhist themes, autumn 1998

20-25 September 1998

THE ZEN OF COOKING

taught by Edward Brown

This course will include meditation, Zen talks, and cooking. Through structured tastings we will acquaint ourselves with root and shoot, flower, leaf, and fruit. We will also explore bread making, knife sharpening, and techniques of cutting

Course fee: 500 pounds sterling, which includes tuition, residential accommodation, food, field trips and all cooking ingredients.

29 October - 6 November 1998

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF AWAKENING

Buddhism in Contemporary Life

taught by Maura Sills and Stephen Batchelor

This course focuses on how insights into the nature of the human mind as found in the Buddhist tradition can be translated into the language and practice of contemporary psychotherapy in the West. The course is suitable for practising psychotherapists and counsellors, as well as those interested in applying Buddhist philosophy in their own lives. A basic meditation practice of mindfulness and awareness will be introduced, allowing participants to appreciate a perspective on life grounded in an understanding of the interdependence of all beings.

The course includes participation in *The Psychology of Awakening II: An International Conference on Buddhism in Contemporary Life*, which takes place at Dartington Hall from October 29th to November 1st

Course fee: 700 pounds sterling, which includes tuition, accommodation, food and field trips, and includes the cost of a place at the Dartington Hall Conference.

For more details about any of the courses in this programme or about the College in general, please take a look at the website or contact: Hilary Nicholson, Schumacher College, The Old Postern, Dartington, Devon TQ9 6EA, UK Tel: 01803 865934 Fax: 01803 866899

Web: <http://www.gn.apc.org/schumachercollege/>

Email: schumcoll@gn.apc.org

SCHUMACHER COLLEGE IS A DEPARTMENT OF THE DARTINGTON HALL TRUST, A REGISTERED EDUCATIONAL CHARITY

BRISTOL MEDITATION EVENINGS

The Bristol Ch'an Group continues to meet on Wednesday Evenings 7.30-10.00 at the Iyengar Yoga Centre, Denmark Place, Gloucester Rd., Bristol. John is available occasionally for personal interviews. Contact Caroline Paine on 0117 924 5332.

DHARMA STUDY GROUP

Tim Paine is co-ordinating this group running in Bristol. Contact him for more details on 0117 924 5332. timothy.paine@which.net

BRIGHTON GROUP

Currently meeting on Mondays. Contact John McGowan on 01273 401643 or email john@conyboro.demon.co.uk.

CARDIFF GROUP

Eddy Street runs the Cardiff group which meets on the last Tuesday of every month at 19 Velindre Rd., Cardiff CF4 7JE. For further details contact Eddy on 01222 691146.

EDINBURGH GROUP

For details contact Frank Tait on 01721 721146.

LONDON GROUP

Currently meeting in London on Fridays at 6:45 p.m. at: The Jamyang Centre, 43 Renfrew Road, Kennington, London. SE11 4NA. For details contact: Bruce Stevenson, 20 Goodhall St, London, NW10 6TU, Tel 0181 961 7802

MANCHESTER GROUP

Simon Child is running a group in Bury. For further details contact him on 0161 761 1945. wcf@child.demon.co.uk

STROUD GROUP

Meeting on Wednesday evenings, for details contact Alec Lawless on 01452 814216.

SWINDON GROUP

For details contact John Senior on 01793 613940.

YORK GROUP

Contact Jake Lynes de Ver on 01904 728419 or James McCarthy on 01904 330977 for details.

New Ch'an Forum is published and distributed by the Western Ch'an Fellowship, registered charity number 1068637, correspondence address 24 Woodgate Ave, Bury, Lancs, BL9 7RU.

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