

Western Chan Fellowship



www.westernchanfellowship.org

8th October 2013

Newsletter 26

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Retreat Programme November 2013 – June 2014

Please refer to the website at www.w-c-f.org/Q342 for the latest updates.

2013

6th – 10th November: How to Make an Art your Life 4-day Retreat

Leader: Ken Jones. Venue: Hourne Farm, E. Sussex

Use the ups and downs of your daily life to work towards a profound easefulness with self and others. We shall focus on relationships, sickness, work and other life experiences. To turn muck into gold we shall use talks, meditation, small group work, interviews and liturgy in a warm-hearted and supportive atmosphere. For this "Everyday Buddhism" please visit www.kenjoneszen.com.

7th – 14th December: Silent Illumination 7-day Retreat

Leader: Simon Child. Venue: Maenllwyd, Wales

Silent Illumination is a profound meditation practice which leads to a mind of great calmness and insight, using ancient Chinese Zen methods which are just as applicable to the modern West. This seven-day silent retreat is an opportunity to learn and deepen this practice through intensive meditation, with instruction and personal guidance by individual interviews with an experienced teacher. Whether or not a breakthrough to Enlightenment may occur, establishing a practice gives a firm basis for subsequent ongoing mindfulness in everyday life.

2014

11th – 16th January: Introduction to Mahamudra and the Compassion of Tara 5-day Retreat

Leader: Sophie Muir. Venue: Maenllwyd, Wales

'The Buddha became enlightened through developing boundless compassion. Our path should be based on compassionate commitment to free all living beings from suffering. In an absolute sense, compassion is the awakened nature of the mind.' Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche

'Compassionate action,' 'enlightened activity,' 'intuitive wisdom': epithets of Bodhisattva Tara - attributes of our own Tara or Buddha nature. Establishing a foundation of clear, open presence through the practice of Mahamudra, practices associated with Tara allow compassion to unfold. This retreat is open to all.

8th – 13th February: Western Zen 5-day Retreat

Leader: Jake Lyne. Venue: Maenllwyd, Wales

This retreat designed for Westerners enables the mind to face the major paradox - Who am I? The question is investigated within a framework of silent sitting meditation, alternating with a tested 'Communication Exercise' in which people work in turns with each member of the group to explore this fundamental Koan.

The intensive focus drives each practitioner into a self-presentation that is difficult to experience in other ways. Practitioners are supported through this process by regular personal interviews with the teachers, interviews being offered most days. This method makes use of words to go beyond words and thereby enter the main gate of Chan. The outcome may be a profound journey through the unity of self, and the acceptance of self, to "self at ease". This may possibly lead further to a direct insight into the ground of being. Participants share a rich experience in new self-knowledge, understanding others and the human condition.

22nd – 29th March: Silent Illumination 7-day Retreat

Leader: Hilary Richards. Venue: Maenllwyd, Wales

Silent Illumination is a profound meditation practice which leads to a mind of great calmness and insight, using ancient Chinese Zen methods which are just as applicable to the modern West. This seven-day silent retreat is an opportunity to learn and deepen this practice through intensive meditation, with instruction and personal guidance by individual interviews with an experienced teacher. Whether or not a breakthrough to Enlightenment may occur, establishing a practice gives a firm basis for subsequent ongoing mindfulness in everyday life.

26th April – 3rd May: Shattering the Great Doubt 7-day Retreat

Leader: Simon Child. Venue: Maenllwyd, Wales

The ancient Chinese Zen practices of investigating Huatou and Gongan (Koan) are best practised in a supportive environment such as this intensive silent Chan retreat. As one becomes deeply absorbed in the practice, mental constructions drop away and one is confronted by a realisation that one does not know the nature of existence and one's fundamental assumptions of life are groundless. Staying with and cultivating this 'doubt', it can become all-consuming 'Great doubt' which may 'shatter', giving a direct insight into reality which may be what is known as an Enlightenment experience.

24th – 29th May: Western Zen 5-day Retreat

Leader: Fiona Nuttall. Venue: Maenllwyd, Wales

This retreat designed for Westerners enables the mind to face the major paradox - Who am I? The question is investigated within a framework of silent sitting meditation, alternating with a tested 'Communication Exercise' in which people work in turns with each member of the group to explore this fundamental Koan.

The intensive focus drives each practitioner into a self-presentation that is difficult to experience in other ways. Practitioners are supported through this process by regular personal interviews with the teachers, interviews being offered most days. This method makes use of words to go beyond words and thereby enter the main gate of Chan. The outcome may be a profound journey through the unity of self, and the acceptance of self, to "self at ease". This may possibly lead further to a direct insight into the ground of being. Participants share a rich experience in new self-knowledge, understanding others and the human condition.

18th – 25th June: Silent Illumination 7-day Retreat

Leader: Jake Lyne. Venue: Bala Brook Retreat Centre, Dartmoor

Silent Illumination is a profound meditation practice which leads to a mind of great calmness and insight, using ancient Chinese Zen methods which are just as applicable to the modern West. This seven-day silent retreat is an opportunity to learn and deepen this practice through intensive meditation, with instruction and personal guidance by individual interviews with an experienced teacher. Whether or not a breakthrough to Enlightenment may occur, establishing a practice gives a firm basis for subsequent ongoing mindfulness in everyday life.

Other Events

1st March: Western Chan Fellowship AGM 2014

This will be held Saturday 1st March, at The Wild Goose Space, St Werbughs, Bristol. Details will be circulated nearer the time.

16th – 18th May: Wesak Weekend

Venue: Leominster Youth Hostel

Further details will be posted on the website soon.

18th – 29th May: Connected Practice

Enhance your practice in your own environment

Join us in a commitment for a period of connected and enhanced practice. We will undertake this in our daily lives, whether at home or in the workplace, with the silent support of knowing that we are not practising alone. We intend to raise the tempo of our practice for this period, increasing our capacity to be aware in our daily lives. A Mindfulness Bell will be rung at noon every day, when all participants may pause and be joined in the silence that the bell marks. Members of our Sangha may use this opportunity in different and creative ways. Open to all.

For an informal chat about connected practice contact Hilary Richards 0117 3300581

Notes from the Teacher

Double-up your Practice with a Dharma buddy

Maintaining a practice can be a lonely activity, if you have no nearby sangha contacts or opportunities to meet them. The German teacher Sylvia Wetzel recommends her practitioners establish a 'tandem', a supportive relationship with a fellow practitioner. Your 'buddy' need not be local to you as communication can be by phone or Skype.

Why not give it a try for yourself? Make an arrangement with a fellow practitioner, who may be an established friend but may also be someone you don't yet know well but have met at a retreat or at your local group. Arrange to contact each other at an interval that suits you, perhaps as infrequently as once every three months, or more often such as monthly if that suits you both, just to share how your practice is going and any difficulties or success that you are experiencing. In this way a sense of sangha is cultivated and you have support in your practice.

European Buddhist Union

Jake Lyne and I attended the European Buddhist Union AGM in France September 26th – 29th. This year's meeting was rather 'dry' in that it focused on revising their constitution and drafting a Vision and Mission Statement. However such details are important because of the role the EBU plays in representing 3 million European Buddhists through its official representation at the Council of Europe. Having a clear statement from EBU of who they are and their vision can help to explain this to diplomats and establish the importance of Buddhism in Europe. These documents will be available soon on the website www.e-b-u.org

European Buddhist Teachers Meeting

Fiona Nuttall joined Jake and I for the much more stimulating annual meeting of a group of European Buddhist Teachers which immediately followed the EBU meeting. This year the gathering was larger than previously with almost 50 teachers present, and lasted three full days. We considered topics such as Transmission Authority and Adaptation, Mindfulness both Buddhist and Secular, and Creating Community, as well as many other ad hoc discussions and conversations. We all found it useful to exchange with teachers of varying experience from many diverse traditions and different countries – picking up some practical tips as well as stimulating deeper reflection on issues in transmitting the Dharma and nurturing our organisations.

Simon Child, *Chuan-fa Jing-hong*
WCF Teacher

Resourcing Experiments in Chan

WCF wishes to support innovative and experimental ways of developing Chan teaching – such as focusing on particular groups, developing educational materials, developing a social media presence or advertising. Some of these ideas will require resources, which the WCF can provide. However, charitable funds are also public funds, and so we need information to make sure this expenditure is justified. There is an application procedure, with applications being reviewed by a subcommittee appointed by WCF committee.

Although applications for funding must be made in writing or electronically to the Treasurer, anyone can ask for informal advice from any of the subcommittee members before a project is attempted or support requested.

- Jeremy Woodward (WCF Treasurer) jemwoodward@aol.com
- Kitty D'Costa kitty_dcosta@hotmail.com
- Clive Richards richards@hilaryandclive.co.uk

Applications are open to WCF members only, and full details including application form can be found in the members-area of WCF website.

Login at <http://w-c-f.org/Q433>, then follow the link to: "Project Grants: Guidelines and Applications".

New Chan Forum

Issue 47 is available for download from the website.

We are looking for contributions for future issues. Currently we are considering the following themes for forthcoming issues so contributions on these would be especially welcome.

- Daily Practice
- Koans in/of Everyday Life
- Reading the literature of a tradition outside the scriptures

Please consider preparing something on one of these themes; it could be something related to your own experience, some teaching that you received that was particularly helpful, or just a few thoughts. It need not be a long piece and could even just fill half a page. Something between 400 and 2500 words would be very suitable.

We would like to include reviews of books that beginners tend to read, e.g. "Zen Mind Beginners Mind" - Suzuki, "Everyday Zen" - Joko Beck, "Hoofprint of the Ox" - Sheng Yen, etc.

By way of introduction for beginners some very brief descriptions and commentaries on the central sutras would be particularly helpful.

Artwork, black-and-white photographs, poems, haiku and haibun would be very much appreciated.

We would like to hear your suggestions for possible themes for future issues.

If any of these things stimulate you then please contact the editor, Eddy Street, who will be more than happy to discuss with you how any idea can be taken forward. He can be contacted at editor@westernchanfellowship.org

Volunteering as a Practice and Sangha Activity

Doug Orton

Earlier in the year, many of the WCF members got together in Leominster to explore who we are as an organisation and how we may grow from the strong roots laid down by our founder, Dr John Crook. It was clear from this meeting that many people would like to see the WCF grow more as a sangha rather than just an organisation providing intensive retreats. Shortly after this meeting, Hilary ran a connected practice experiment over the Wesak period with positive feedback from those who took part. To keep up the momentum of this sangha building, the WCF would like to offer the opportunity of mindful practice for the benefit of the WCF community. This could take the form of volunteering to help with some small administrative tasks required to keep the charity running smoothly. Alternatively, members could volunteer to help create educational material, articles for the NCF or artworks, etc, to be shared with the WCF sangha. There are plenty of opportunities for those who would like to get more involved.

At present, just a few committee members carry out the majority of the workload associated with running the WCF. It would be great to alleviate some of their workload so that they can concentrate on other activities – such as teaching the Dharma!

For those practitioners interested in helping, the idea is that they may like to make a commitment to themselves to do (for example) one hour per week or a few hours per month of mindful practice for the WCF sangha as an offering/Dana. This could be done alone, or together with others.

I should emphasise that this would be a commitment that is made to oneself, not to the WCF. It will not be monitored in anyway. Any work carried out will be most gratefully received. Also, this is not compulsory and members will not be judged on whether they have volunteered or not. Most of us live very busy lives and we may feel we are not able to offer any time and this is perfectly ok.

If you feel you would like to volunteer or create some artwork, please get in touch and we can discuss the wide variety of jobs available. If you have any particular skills such as word-processing, audio/video editing, graphic design, a photography interest, admin experience, publicity, advertising, social networking, etc then please state them. However, these skills are not essential for your helping out.

To volunteer, please contact Doug at the following email address:

volunteering@westernchanfellowship.org

It's important to remember that these tasks are to be carried out as mindful practice, as a service or offering. With this in mind I have written a short article on the practice of Dana which some may find useful.

A Practical guide to the Dana Paramita

As Chan practitioners, we are often invited to give Dana (in the form of money) at the end of retreats or other events. It can be easy to associate Dana with this type of activity without touching the essence of the practice. Unless we are very poor, we probably find it quite easy to put some cash into the Dana bowl at the end of a retreat, but there is more to Dana than just opening our wallets. So lets take a deeper look into the Dana Paramita and familiarise ourselves with the true essence of the practice.

Firstly, a dictionary definition of the six paramitas: *The Sanskrit word 'paramita' means to cross over to the other shore. Paramita can also be translated as 'perfection' or 'perfect realisation'. Through the practice of the six paramitas or perfections (giving, morality, patience, joyous effort, concentration and wisdom) we cross over the sea of suffering (samsara) to the shore of happiness and awakening (nirvana).*

There are many reasons why people give. Some give to feel good about themselves while others may give in the hope of receiving future blessings. Some may feel pressured into giving. Others may give publicly in order to boost their image or status. Although all of these types of giving can do good in the world, none of them can be classified as Dana (the perfection of giving) as in all these cases the motivation is said to be 'impure'. Here we touch upon the essence of the Dana Paramita; only when we give with a boundless openness of heart and mind, with no expectation of result or reward are we practicing the Dana Paramita. This giving without attachment to giver, gift or recipient is described in the Diamond Sutra (translation by Red Pine, Counterpoint 2001):

The Buddha says to Subhuti, *"When bodhisattvas give a gift, they should not be attached to a thing. When they give a gift, they should not be attached to anything at all. They should not be attached to a sight when they give a gift, nor should they be attached to a sound, a smell, a taste, a touch or a dharma when they give a gift."*

The Buddha goes on to say, *"The body of merit of those bodhisattvas who give a gift without being attached is not easy to measure."*

The path of Chan tends to emphasise meditation in order to cultivate wisdom and compassion. During intensive retreats, a practitioner may make a deep and sincere vow to liberate innumerable beings. With continued, diligent practice, from this limitless vow, one obtains a limitless result - anuttara samyak sambodhi (unexcelled, perfect enlightenment). From this text from the Diamond Sutra, we can see that in a similar way, by giving a gift without being attached we obtain an immeasurable body of merit.

However, giving a gift without being attached can be tricky as this act itself is an expression of unexcelled, perfect enlightenment. When we try to give, we often find there is a conflict of interest or, you could say, a conflict of self-interest, especially when it comes to giving our time. Most of us lead very busy lives and our free time is precious to us so how do we go beyond our selfishness in order to be able to give without attachment?

Well, we work with the essence of the practice of Dana and we start very small. Our practice could start from a simple offering of incense along with a heartfelt wish for the benefit of all beings, for example:

"I offer this incense to all sentient beings, may all attain equanimity."

This simple act of returning to our heart and making a heartfelt wish for the benefit of all sentient beings is the root of this practice. It may sound insignificant, but the result is inconceivable. All great rivers have very humble beginnings and, similarly, from the thought of benefitting others perfect Buddhahood is accomplished.

Although we start small, we may find with time, we build on this practice of offering. For example, we may also like to take some of our food from our plate and offer it to the Buddha with a similar wish:

"I offer this food to all sentient beings, may all take nourishment."

When we take these tiny steps we begin to open and awaken our hearts. The process of making such an offering can be inherently purifying. With such a wish we can return to immaculacy and then, with a clear mind, we can really taste our food with a heart full of gratitude. With each offering, we water the seeds of goodness that each one of us possesses innately. With continued practice, day after day, month after month, these seeds of goodness grow into flowers of kindness and compassion that overflow from our own private practice into our daily lives. More often than not, when asked to help, we find we are able to do so without any fuss. Not only do we become kinder to others, but we are kinder to ourselves. This awakened heart of compassion melts our own vexations bringing serenity and bliss. At such a time, we are open to offer our love, compassion, time, energy, and resources to serve the highest welfare of all beings as the situation requires without the usual conflicts of self-interest and without 'trying' to do good. In his teachings on Silent Illumination, Zen Master Hongzhi writes, "Clearly manifesting responsive interaction like box and lid fitting together or arrowheads meeting.' Here he is describing a quality of silent illumination where one can respond perfectly to conditions as they arise without any contrived activity; this is only possible with an open heart and we can see the continued practice of Dana taking us in a similar direction.

If you are volunteering, make such a wish before your practice, "*I offer my time and effort to carry out this work for the benefit of all beings*", then you are more likely to work single-mindedly without any conflicts in your mind.

Enjoy your work!

Local Events

Several local groups arrange day retreats and other events from time to time. See the website events page <http://w-c-f.org/Q342> and individual groups pages <http://w-c-f.org/Q3> for details

Coming up soon are day retreats in Cardiff (October 19th), Harlow (3rd November), and Manchester (24th November).

Mailings

If you no longer wish to receive postal mailings, please help us save printing and postage costs by notifying admin@westernchanfellowship.org