



westernchanfellowship.org

January 2025

NEWSLETTER 51

WESTERN CHAN FELLOWSHIP NEWS AND EVENTS

We have extended our retreat programme up to the end of 2025. We are continuing to take some non-intrusive precautions against Covid-19 transmission on retreats: details are given on the website retreats page which also lists upcoming events and any updates: www.w-c-f.org/Q342

15TH – 20TH MARCH: WESTERN ZEN RETREAT – 5-NIGHT RETREAT

LEADER: JAKE LYNE. VENUE: SHAWBOTTOM, PEAK DISTRICT [HTTP://W-C-F.ORG/Q487-469](http://w-c-f.org/Q487-469)

Who am I? Thoroughly confronting this question can take us directly to the centre of our being. Over the course of this five-night retreat you will investigate the question "Who am I?" within a standard retreat framework, using silent meditation in conjunction with a unique method of verbal inquiry. This format allows you to use words to go beyond words and thereby enter the main gate of Chan.

The intensive nature of this process of inquiry drives each practitioner into a self-presentation that is difficult to experience in other ways. To guide and support you, personal interviews with the teachers are offered regularly throughout the retreat. With whole-hearted engagement this retreat may lead to the acceptance of self, the experience of 'self at ease', and may even provide an opportunity for direct insight into the ground of being.

12TH – 19TH APRIL: ILLUMINATING THE MIND – 7-NIGHT RETREAT

LEADER: SIMON CHILD. VENUE: SHAWBOTTOM, PEAK DISTRICT [HTTP://W-C-F.ORG/Q487-470](http://w-c-f.org/Q487-470)

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. It is the origin of the Japanese Soto Zen practice of Shikantaza but is approached somewhat differently and full instruction will be given.

This seven-night 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 and compassion in everyday life.

24TH – 31ST MAY: INVESTIGATING KOANS – 7-NIGHT RETREAT

LEADER: FIONA NUTTALL. VENUE: SHAWBOTTOM, PEAK DISTRICT [HTTP://W-C-F.ORG/Q487-471](http://w-c-f.org/Q487-471)

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, supported by personal interviews. 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.

28TH JUNE – 3RD JULY: MID-SUMMER SILENT MEDITATION RETREAT – 5-NIGHTS

LEADERS: ALYSUN JONES AND JULIET HACKNEY. VENUE: SHAWBOTTOM, PEAK DISTRICT [HTTP://W-C-F.ORG/Q487-474](http://w-c-f.org/Q487-474)

This silent retreat is based on the Buddha's early teachings on mindfulness. It is suitable for beginner and experienced meditators alike. It will encourage you to develop your awareness through focussing on different aspects of mindfulness (including the body, feelings and mind).

Practising meditation may help to clarify and settle your habitual reactions. This leads to a more direct appreciation of the here and now and the possibility of experiencing greater freedom in everyday life.

Rising early each day the retreat will include teaching on Buddhist principles, meditation instruction, silent and guided meditation. There will also be mindful movement practice (from a qualified Tai Chi Movements for Wellbeing instructor), and individual meetings with the teachers for personal guidance.

18TH – 27TH JULY 2025: ILLUMINATING THE MIND – 9-NIGHT RETREAT

LEADER: SIMON CHILD. VENUE: SHAWBOTTOM, PEAK DISTRICT [HTTP://W-C-F.ORG/Q487-475](http://w-c-f.org/Q487-475)

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. It is the origin of the Japanese Soto Zen practice of Shikantaza but is approached somewhat differently and full instruction will be given.

This nine-night 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 and compassion in everyday life.

23RD – 28TH AUGUST: WESTERN ZEN RETREAT – 5-NIGHT RETREAT

LEADER: JAKE LYNE. VENUE: SHAWBOTTOM, PEAK DISTRICT [HTTP://W-C-F.ORG/Q487-476](http://w-c-f.org/Q487-476)

Who am I? Thoroughly confronting this question can take us directly to the centre of our being. Over the course of this five-night retreat you will investigate the question "Who am I?" within a standard

retreat framework, using silent meditation in conjunction with a unique method of verbal inquiry. This format allows you to use words to go beyond words and thereby enter the main gate of Chan.

The intensive nature of this process of inquiry drives each practitioner into a self-presentation that is difficult to experience in other ways. To guide and support you, personal interviews with the teachers are offered regularly throughout the retreat. With whole-hearted engagement this retreat may lead to the acceptance of self, the experience of 'self at ease', and may even provide an opportunity for direct insight into the ground of being.



PAUL BRENNAN JANUARY 2025 SILENT ILLUMINATION RETREAT

26TH – 28TH SEPTEMBER: WEEKEND CHAN RETREAT – 2-NIGHT RETREAT

LEADER: SIMON CHILD. VENUE: SHAWBOTTOM, PEAK DISTRICT [HTTP://W-C-F.ORG/Q487-480](http://w-c-f.org/Q487-480)

Discover who you are through Chan meditation. Learn to cultivate clarity, wisdom and compassion through the practice of meditation according to the Chan (Chinese Zen) tradition.

This weekend retreat will offer teaching in Chan methods for newcomers, and ample practice opportunity for experienced meditators. The schedule will be less intensive than that of a full Chan retreat, but we shall rise early with a concentrated programme of sitting meditation and exercise sessions.

4TH – 11TH OCTOBER: INVESTIGATING KOANS – 7-NIGHT RETREAT

LEADER: SIMON CHILD. VENUE: SHAWBOTTOM, PEAK DISTRICT [HTTP://W-C-F.ORG/Q487-477](http://w-c-f.org/Q487-477)

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, supported by personal interviews. 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.

15TH – 22ND NOVEMBER: ILLUMINATING THE MIND – 7-NIGHT RETREAT

LEADER: FIONA NUTTALL. VENUE: SHAWBOTTOM, PEAK DISTRICT [HTTP://W-C-F.ORG/Q487-478](http://w-c-f.org/Q487-478)

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. It is the origin of the Japanese Soto Zen practice of Shikantaza but is approached somewhat differently and full instruction will be given.

This seven-night 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 and compassion in everyday life.

29TH NOVEMBER – 4TH DECEMBER: WESTERN ZEN RETREAT – 5-NIGHT RETREAT

LEADER: SIMON CHILD. VENUE: SHAWBOTTOM, PEAK DISTRICT [HTTP://W-C-F.ORG/Q487-479](http://w-c-f.org/Q487-479)

Who am I? Thoroughly confronting this question can take us directly to the centre of our being. Over the course of this five-night retreat you will investigate the question "Who am I?" within a standard retreat framework, using silent meditation in conjunction with a unique method of verbal inquiry. This format allows you to use words to go beyond words and thereby enter the main gate of Chan.

The intensive nature of this process of inquiry drives each practitioner into a self-presentation that is difficult to experience in other ways. To guide and support you, personal interviews with the teachers are offered regularly throughout the retreat. With whole-hearted engagement this retreat may lead to the acceptance of self, the experience of 'self at ease', and may even provide an opportunity for direct insight into the ground of being.

DAILY/WEEKLY ONLINE AND LOCAL EVENTS

On most days of the week there are online events available for you to attend. Please see the list at <http://w-c-f.org/Q728> Even when these events are arranged by a WCF local group leader they are open to attendance from anyone including those outside their area.

We also have a Western Chan Fellowship Practice Support Group on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/257812581073712>

We have a long-established mailing list called WCftalk, where you can discuss Chan topics with others. Apply for membership at: <https://groups.io/g/wcftalk/>

Details of local group meeting schedules and events can be found at <http://w-c-f.org/Q3>

BRISTOL DAY RETREAT

Bristol Chan Group are holding a Day Retreat on Saturday 3rd May led by Jeremy & Jeanine Woodward. For further details please contact Pat Simmons at bristolchan@westernchanfellowship.org



PAUL BRENNAN SHAWBOTTOM SNOWMAN

KENT CHAN GROUP

THURSDAY EVENING MEETINGS

Currently the Kent Chan Group meets online, but it is planned at some point in the Spring that the class will be hosted in a new Dharma Centre which is due to open in Rochester. The class will then be offered in a hybrid format meaning that people can either attend in person or continue to connect online.

DAY RETREATS AT THE ST BENEDICT'S CENTRE, WEST MALLING

The regular quarterly programme of day retreats continues in 2025, scheduled on the dates below. Further details about the day retreats can be found at <http://w-c-f.org/Q41>

- Sundays 9th March, 8th June, 7th September, 7th December

DAY RETREAT WITH BODHICHARYA LONDON AT THE BUDDHIST SOCIETY

On Saturday 11th October, Stuart McLeod will be leading an Introduction to Chan day retreat as a guest of Bodhicharya London, hosted at the Buddhist Society near Victoria. You can find more details at <https://bodhicharya-london.org/day-retreats/>.

SAVE THE DATE: WESTERN CHAN FELLOWSHIP AGM

Morning of Sunday 22nd June

SHAWBOTTOM OPEN WEEKEND AND WCF AGM

Similar to 2023, the 2025 AGM will be held as a hybrid meeting both online and also in person at Shawbottom. This includes an open invitation to members to take the opportunity to visit Shawbottom and stay over the weekend on a self-catering basis at no charge. An opportunity for socialising, for longer walks in the area, or whatever you prefer. If you wish to stay, apply in advance to teacher@westernchanfellowship.org so that we can coordinate numbers and parking.

WCF QUESTIONNAIRE – RETREATS

SURVEY RESULTS

We received a very good response (199 completed questionnaires) to our recent survey. Our thanks to all who replied and made it a useful and informative exercise. We are appropriately cautious about overinterpreting data from a self-selected group of respondents but nevertheless some useful pointers have emerged.

RETREAT COSTS

Understandably costs are an issue for many, both the retreat fees themselves and also the cost of travelling to retreat. With our retreat fee freeze in 2024 (and a smaller than inflation increase in 2025) we are already trying to address fee levels. We are exploring additional ways to further reduce retreat fees. We will upgrade the lift-sharing facility on the website to be more flexible and to include support for taxi-sharing.

SUPPORTED PLACES ('BURSARIES')

Several people described how they feel unable to pay full fees, and hence no longer attend retreats, but did not feel that they “qualify” to take a supported place. We would like to clarify that supported retreat places (typically a 50% discount) do not have any qualifying rules. They are an option available to select at the time of booking, open to anyone who considers the full fee is currently too difficult to meet, even if they are employed or otherwise have an income.

We have increased the number of supported places that we offer per retreat but not all are being used, so your taking a supported place does not usually result in denying such support to others. Some people overcome their concern about using supported places by taking an attitude that if their circumstances improve in future they may donate back the support they have received – there is absolutely no obligation to do that but if that helps you to accept a supported place to enable you to attend retreat then please consider that.

RETREAT STYLES

In line with our experience of booking numbers, the survey respondents’ primary choice of retreat is Silent Illumination, followed by Western Zen and then Koan retreats. We will continue to offer koan



retreats, because for those who attend koan retreats they are a very effective method, but in future we will probably offer Silent illumination retreats more often than koan retreats.

We used to offer a nine-night retreat once or twice most years. 34 people indicated they are “very likely” to want to attend a 9-night retreat if we reintroduce those, so we have listed a 9-night Silent Illumination retreat for this July. Please book in to support it!

The primary interest is in our ‘standard’ retreat types (as above) with only a moderate appetite for online retreats, and less interest in social/sangha events or themed retreats. There is more interest in shorter weekend or midweek in-person events, and also in Dharma study events. We are considering how we can best respond to these latter points, and meantime we have listed a weekend retreat for September.

Some people told us they have found other teachers or other styles of practice in recent years. It is quite natural that will happen to some extent, and we have never felt ‘possessive’ of our members or practitioners – John Crook used to promote what he called “Open Buddhism” i.e. it can be useful to try out different practices and teachers to find what is right for you. Equally we have newcomers practising regularly with us who used to practise with other teachers.

HEALTH ISSUES

Health/disability barriers were shared by several people. Everyone has aged five years since 2020, sometimes bringing illness and disability. Some are experiencing long Covid. Some respondents are now in need of care for themselves, while others have become carers for children, for parents, or for partners, reducing their ability to be away from home.

COVID PRECAUTIONS

We have continued some non-intrusive precautions against spreading Covid during a retreat (we ask you to test once before arriving at retreat, and once more on the second day of a retreat, to minimise the risk of active infection being present in a retreat group). We do not require mask-wearing nor any specific travel precautions. Though person to person contact is not very close during a retreat, contact is very prolonged with multiple people all occupying shared spaces for over 20 hours per day (e.g. bedrooms, meditation hall, dining room). These precautions make it possible for people with moderate degrees of vulnerability to attend retreat. In our survey only 12% felt these precautions to be unnecessary or inappropriate, with 88% considering them to be supportive / appropriate (48%) or understandable for the safety of others (40%).



BLUESKY

Western Chan Fellowship now has a presence on Bluesky. Please follow us if you are a Bluesky user:

<https://bsky.app/profile/westernchanfellowship.org>