

COLUMBIA ZEN BUDDHIST PRIORY

NEWSLETTER

NUMBER 23

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Dear Friends,

Rev. Master Haryo, the Head of our Order, intends to visit us in October. His current plans would have him here during our public activities on Wednesday evening, October 14th. You are welcome and encouraged to take advantage of this opportunity to meet him.

We have a new resident at the Priory. Rev. Leon Kackman, a senior monk of 15 years standing, is now training with us here. He is a disciple of Rev. Master Eko Little, the Abbot of Shasta Abbey. I would like to welcome Rev. Leon and wish him the best in his training. Please come and say hello. Rev. Leon and I both have some food intolerances, and although we are very grateful for food donations, especially prepared meals or fresh produce, it would be helpful if you would check with us before bringing specific foods.

Also, if anyone has power tools that you would be willing to lend to the Priory for short periods, please let us know.

Thank all of you who support the priory with your spiritual practice, time, energy, and donations. We depend on that support and are grateful for your generosity and efforts.

Yours in the Dharma,
Rev. Rokuzan Kroenke

OFFERING

Cultivating the Will(ingness) to Train

One effective way to help encourage us to begin and sustain Buddhist training is by allowing ourselves to become open to that little nagging suspicion that everything is not well, and that we don't know what to do about it. For some, this awareness arises without apparent effort, sometimes very suddenly, or more often slowly – over time. For others, this awareness needs to be cultivated. We do this by the very daily training that we may be looking for a way to encourage: meditation, keeping the Precepts, participating at our local temple, etc. In the latter case, it may be helpful to remember that Buddhism is a religion, and thus faith is a vital aspect of its practice. If we are willing to have faith that the Buddha found Something important, and that we, as human beings like Him, can find it too, then we already have the faith to begin – to at least try this Path of His – and just see where it leads us.

Even with this faith, it is important to understand that becoming aware of this nagging suspicion, this feeling of unsatisfactoriness, may take time because many of us have become remarkably skilled at habitually distracting ourselves from this 'burr under our saddle.' Admitting to this spiritual discomfort, however, is the first step in being able to do something about it. As long as we hide from it, as long as we refuse to look at it, so long will the habits that produce this distractedness continue to control us. And these very habits wash over into everything else that we do. It is not possible to restrict any of our habits to affecting just those things that discomfort us. Once developed our habits define and confine all of our behavior, whether we intend them to or not. A habit of distraction means that we are never fully there for *anything*, and are thus continually suffering unintended consequences.

To deal with this or any other habit, however, may be pretty scary. It will mean that we need to do something about ourselves, i.e. to change. The Buddha gave us a roadmap – the Buddha-Dharma – for just this purpose, to guide us in this doing, this conversion. By following this map we slowly learn to allow the Buddha Nature, which pervades all things, to help us, i.e. we learn to 'listen' to our Hearts – the still, small voice within. One consequence of this opening to our Hearts is that we eventually see that our dissatisfaction is all our own, and fully our responsibility. We also eventually see that since it is ours, since we made the decisions, and created the habits and expectations that led to our suffering, we have the power to do something about it.

Training helps us to clearly see our decisions, our habits, our expectations, etc. in a more detached way. Through this we come to understand that there are things in our lives which we willfully do (or do not do) that cause suffering for ourselves and others. To willfully do these things we have to ignore the promptings of our own Heart. This is the real breakage of the Precepts. Also, through training, we eventually come to learn that our habitual, painful ways of beating ourselves up when we make mistakes do not help us to stop making them.

My Master frequently admonished us to turn the stream of compassion within, i.e. to be willing to try to have compassion for ourselves. In my experience this is hard for many of us to do. Compassion is not about allowing ourselves to do what we want, what we like. That is not being compassionate – only continuing to create suffering in our old habitual ways. What is truly compassionate is to work on being willing to forgive ourselves, while simultaneously working on stopping doing those things that we find hard to forgive. And then, when we do them again, we must once again try to forgive ourselves, while redoubling our efforts not to repeat that mistake. We do this over and over again, until finally, with more gentleness than we had imagined, we do change, we do stop allowing old habits to control us – at least much of the time. We find that we really can accept ourselves, and forgive ourselves for not being what we think we should be.

So, by allowing ourselves to become aware, at least on some level, of the impermanence and dis-ease inherent in this world, we begin to cultivate the willingness to train. This is the gift of that discomfort – because it helps us to be willing to deepen our practice. We continue to cultivate that willingness – and we grasp our will – by being willing to repeatedly try to forgive ourselves, by persistently just taking the next step, by continually doing the best that we can. By simply ‘opening our eyes’ to what is there and being willing to do something about what we see, by using the Precepts as our guide and aspiration, we truly turn the stream of compassion within and thereby enter the Way of the Buddhas and Ancestors.