

COLUMBIA ZEN BUDDHIST PRIORY

NEWSLETTER

NUMBER 22

II & III, 2008

Dear Friend,

We wish you peace and joy for this holiday season, and all best wishes in the new year. We extend our welcome to all of you who may wish to share our practice.

Well, we have finally done it. We have gotten a computer. This is the first computer that I have ever had and it is a little overwhelming. Each new step taken opens up whole new vistas of ignorance. I am still very much in the beginning process of learning to use it. Through the generosity of friends, I was able to convert all the files from my old word processor (which is really a sort of glorified typewriter, with memory and a printer). That was a relief, but for various reasons, it took more than a year. Given that, and my not buying the computer until August, I am just now being able to start communicating again.

For those of you who received my last newsletter, you know that I was planning on going on retreat at North Cascades Buddhist Priory, which is not too far from Olympia, Washington. That was a very helpful renewal, and a wonderful opportunity to see a number of old monastic friends again. I was there for a little more than two months, returning around the middle of May. I would like to again express my thanks to the Prior, Rev. Master Koshin, and the monks there for their kind and generous hospitality, and to Rev. Master Basil who graciously oversaw the Columbia Priory while I was away.

In September, I traveled to Shasta Abbey in northern California, for one of our more or less annual OBC monastic gatherings at various venues. On my journey there, I stopped over at the Eugene (Oregon) Buddhist Priory for a couple of days. Rev. Master Oswin, the Prior, was one of those most helpful in enabling me to transfer those old word processor files. I had never before visited the Priory at that location, and was very impressed with all the work that he and his congregation have done. With a couple of other old monastic friends, we drove down to Shasta for the gathering. It was wonderful to be there with 40 monks, many of whom I hadn't seen for a number of years. After the gathering, I travelled north with Rev. Master Meiko and Rev. Clairissa of the Portland (Oregon) Buddhist Priory, with whom I stayed for a couple of days. All were most kind, welcoming and generous, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank them again.

Also, thank you to Rev. Master Seikai of Pine Mountain Buddhist Temple who, hearing of my word processor difficulties, offered his old StarWriter. This will give me permanent access to any files that I had on my even older StarWriter. Lastly, thank you to all of those other kind friends who did their best to discover ways to try to convert the old files, before we finally were able to benefit from Rev. Masters Oswin's and Seikai's generosity. It has been an interesting process with many useful lessons in training.

I have previously mentioned that we needed maintenance on our mansard style roof. Our roof consists of small, flat-roofed areas at the peak, which transform to relatively steeply sloped, shingle-covered areas over the rest of the roof. A portion of our flat, back porch roof was actually crumbling from rot. Over the rest of the roof, the “drip edges,” where the flat-roofed areas meet the sloped areas, all seemed to have a tendency to leak. Finding help with this has been another interesting saga. Over a period of years I have tried to get repair estimates, but no roofers ever agreed on what needed to be done, and their estimates were thus not comparable. It has been very confusing. I finally found a contractor that seemed to have a good feeling for what was needed. He has just finished the work repairing and re-roofing the back porch, as well as replacing the drip edges, repairing leaks and otherwise maintaining the rest of the roof (which apparently doesn't need to be re-roofed at this time). Having that project completed is a relief, although more expensive than I had hoped.

Since being back, I have been trying to recover from the trip, which I found very hard, and am beginning to work on becoming computer literate, and catching up with what I have had to put aside for more than a year. I have much to do!

Yours in the Dharma,
Rev. Rokuzan Kroenke

OFFERING

Wanting To Train, Or Not

This is a revised edition of an article of mine originally published in The Journal of Shasta Abbey, Volume XII, nos. 9 & 10, September-October, 1981.

In my early years of Buddhist training, I came to understand, even long before I became a monk, that I had difficulty sustaining my practice. I simply had trouble wanting to do it. I remember a question I asked repeatedly: ‘How do I manage to want to train?’ It took me many years to see that a misunderstanding lies at the heart of this question. I had assumed that to train, it was necessary to want to, rather than to simply feel that I ought to. Underlying that was the basic belief that it was necessary, in some sense, to want to do anything that I did—or else why do it? This delusion was a large part of the source of my difficulty in maintaining the will to train. I knew that when I wanted to do something it came more easily. The energy, the will, tended to just be there. I felt comfortable with what I was doing. It was easier to get out of bed in the morning. It was easier to be bright and positive, and this was how I thought training should to be. Whenever it wasn't, I would worry. I would worry that I was a bad trainee, that I was doing something wrong.

What I was essentially asking with my question ‘How do I manage to want to train?’ was ‘How do I make it easier?’ One of the reasons that training has always been difficult for me is because I don't want to do things that don't come easily or comfortably. Training is a growing, a changing, a willingness to forgo the security of the known and, therefore, may not be easy or comfortable. Accepting that can be difficult. To willingly sit still in the midst of discomfort, insecurity, or uncertainty may feel quite strange.

When we really begin to make an effort in anything, it is natural to notice resistance. We can look at this negatively, fall into anger or despair, be convinced that the resistance means that we are incapable, compare this with the lack of resistance we feel when we ‘want’ to do something, or we can see this as the beginning of broadening our limits, of opening ourselves to growth, and actually doing something about ourselves. The second choice is the compassionate one. It is allowing ourselves to do something without getting our opinions of ‘like’ or ‘not like’ in the way. Training is to do our best to sit still beneath these opposites; otherwise we will never allow ourselves to grow.

If you are one of those people who reacts to this resistance by giving up, by giving in to despair, or by just slowing down, then for once try putting in more energy, whether you feel like it or not, and just see what happens. If you are climbing a mountain and the resistance increases, you know that the effort must increase if you want to get to the top. It is your choice.