

NEWSLETTER
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THIRTY YEARS AS A MONK

On December 13th, 1975, I was one of two monks ordained by Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett. Although I have been at it for thirty years, I don't feel particularly spiritual, or enlightened, or wise. If I were able to communicate this to that person ordained three decades ago, he would be very surprised. He had so many expectations. What I do feel is immensely grateful: grateful for the Buddha-Dharma that the Buddha so compassionately made available two-and-a-half millennia ago; grateful that I found such a wonderful teacher who made Buddhism so clear in a way that I could understand, in a way that I have found very accessible to Westerners; grateful to the 83 monks who passed on the Buddha-Dharma in an unbroken line between the Buddha and my Master; grateful that something in me that I don't fully understand persevered in training, although there were many times when it felt beyond me. I am so very grateful for the compassionate patience of my Master who was willing to put up with me in all of my confusion, my resistance, my distraction, my resentment, my lust. So much of the time, I didn't have a clue, and when I did, I often didn't follow it, because it wasn't what I wanted to do.

Things have slowly gotten better. I have found a deep and abiding faith in the Buddha-Dharma; a willingness to listen to my heart and to actually follow it, using the Precepts as my guide and aspiration; a sitting-place, and others who share my practice; an extended family of wonderful, bright and loving people, who also kindly and patiently have put up with me over all this time; and a willingness to sit still in the midst of (at least some of) my suffering. What I am trying to say is, if this path that the Buddha revealed so long ago can work for me, it can certainly work for you. You simply have to be stubborn enough not to give up.

Rather than hardness, this stubbornness flows out of willingness: the willingness to have faith that we too can find what the Buddha found; the willingness to look up when our inclination is to look down; the willingness to trust our teacher and our own Buddha Nature; the willingness to try to actually make the practice real in our daily lives; the willingness to accept, and not to judge, using the wisdom that comes from long, hard, sometimes painful training to know what that means; the willingness to have compassion and patience, but not indulgence, for our "selves"; the willingness to continue to try to do our best; the willingness to just keep at it, to persevere.

Rev. Rokuzan Kroenke
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