

The Berkeley Buddhist Priory Newsletter November - December, 2004

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Find a Hole and Fill It by Rev. Oswin Hollenbeck

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When we reflect on our practice of bright stillness in formal meditation and everyday life, we may come to see patterns, perspectives, movement, and direction. By listening to and heeding the "still, small voice" moment by moment, we can usually see what we need to do in our lives, at least short-term. These small moments add up to larger movements. If this direction takes the shape of a livelihood, it is sometimes called our "calling." However, in contemplative practice the emphasis is on how we live and act rather than on what we do. If we develop stillness and flexibility, simply doing that which needs to be done with a grateful and accepting heart, we can find the truth that Great Master Dogen expresses as, "Nothing whatsoever in Buddhism can be set aside as a worldly task". And we will be prepared and able to take the bigger steps of life when they arise.

Many people worry too much about finding out what it is they're "supposed" to do in life, or in religious training. Some of the best advice my master, Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett, gave me on this subject was, "Find a hole and fill it." I had asked a rather intellectual question at a community tea about the relationship between the Bodhisattva vows and the Bodhisattva precepts. Rev. Master responded with a very practical answer, as she often did, addressing the heart of the questioner and giving a valuable piece

of teaching. She told the story of the pink concrete truck which she had seen going around town in the San Francisco Bay Area where she would spend summers. The truck had a slogan on its side, "Find a hole and fill it." It was this homely adage that Rev. Master held up to me as the way to fulfill the Bodhisattva ideal. It can also help to answer worry or anxiety about what we "should" be doing or help clarify what the next step is.

Rev. Master then kindly elaborated on the truck and its purpose: it simply went about finding holes--needs--and filling them. No grandiose ideals or pretensions: just simple, ordinary, practical, useful kind of work. It is enough to reflect within and meditate on the situation we find ourselves in--together with its needs and our abilities--and respond naturally and instinctively from meditation, doing what seems good and what we can.

This wisdom still helps me in my training, particularly in my daily life as a monk living at a small temple. I do not have to look for holes: the needs are usually obvious and all around me! I just have to get about doing what needs to be done. Most of it is pretty ordinary work. Sometimes I cook, sometimes I clean, sometimes I answer the phone or send e-mail. Sometimes I wrestle with my computer (most of us know what that's like!). Sometimes I meditate, and sometimes I do a ceremony. It is a wonderful opportunity to drop the discriminatory mind, letting go of my "shoulds" and "wants," and to practice that "all work is that of the Buddha." There is just the getting on with filling "holes"--the small acts of daily life right in front of us--wholeheartedly and with a bright mind. Thus we sanctify the mundane and embody the Bodhisattva. Thus we heed the "call" of, we "catch," the Lord of the House (another name for the Unborn), as Rev. Master Jiyu relates in her diary of her years of training in Japan, *The Wild, White Goose* (2000 ed., pp. 46, 62, 477).

I've seen other wisdom in this story over the years. First, it's

probably human to want to do some kind of important or lasting work, or have a grand "calling." Might this be fame and gain, ambition? It's the humble work of many "concrete trucks" that make our lives possible and easier by filling up the "potholes". Everyone notices the potholes in the streets and complain about them before the holes are filled; how many of us reflect in gratitude on a road which has been repaired and rides smoothly? "Take nothing for granted" is another good Zen adage. The bodhisattva--person doing Buddhist training--is not interested in glory. They just wish to purify their heart and benefit sentient beings in some way. The scale is of no concern, and all beings are worthy of assistance.

Also, the cement truck driver is usually an ordinary type of guy (or gal), someone who embodies the morning office teaching of "Do not waste time." Cement work is dirty, messy, physically hard, and usually done under pressure--the cement is drying out and there's another job to get to! Likewise our work as a bodhisattva, filling the hole we find in front of us, can be difficult. We get our hands and clothes dirty, we become tired, and there's always another hole to fill. Yet most of the cement drivers I've met are usually cheerful people, and the one who delivered a load for our temple handicap slab here at Eugene got right out there and helped us with the spreading and screeding. He also came back with another load--unanticipated--way past normal operating hours so that we could finish the job. Can we be as cheerful and benevolent to others in our daily lives and not be concerned about rewards and compensations, recognition, or even gratitude?

Another way this story continues to help me in my training is that it's humorous. Rev. Master Jiyu had a wonderful sense of humor and used it often to make a point. She seemed to really get a kick out of the color of the cement truck, pink not being the color one would usually associate with that kind of work. Rev. Master had

the skill to help us look beyond the ordinary way of viewing things, what Dogen calls the kaleidoscopic mind, and often she did it with humor. The incongruous color of the truck's big churning bin of gray muck helps me not to take myself so seriously. It was another way of saying, "Lighten up!" and not see ourselves as so important.

The analogy of the concrete truck also points out to make the best use of what we have and what is right in front of us. No longing for a different body or mind or a different set of circumstances. Just do the best you can right now, fill the hole there in front of you.

A few other points in closing.

- 1) The cement truck does not create holes to fill in.
- 2) There are some holes that we do not have the right mixture of cement for: with the mind of all-acceptance we go on to holes we can do something about.
- 3) There are other holes that are so vast that we would be wise to pass them up in order to help in places where it would make a difference.
- 4) Sometimes the street needs to be torn up and resurfaced: we need to join forces with other trucks to do the job.
- 5) There will always be holes so there will always be work, training, for us: we need not fret about ever not having enough to do.
- 6) Trucks need love and care: keep them in good working condition, providing maintenance, repairs, rest, and fuel.
- 7) We can go home at the end of the day, resting content that

we have done our best, and sleeping in peace so that we may go on filling holes another day.

Buddha's Enlightenment: Sunday, December 12

The Priory will celebrate the great Enlightenment of the Buddha, on Sunday, December 12. Part of practicing at the Priory is learning to make Buddhism an integral part of our life. Growing up in America means we were raised and familiar with Judeo-Christian religious celebrations and we are not acquainted with comparable Buddhist traditions. An important aspect of human life is sharing and celebrating with others. Although we offer many different ceremonies and services at the Priory, there are certain holidays that it is helpful for the Sangha to make a special effort to come together and share their gratitude with others. Commemorating the Buddha's Enlightenment in December is an occasion for the Sangha to gather together and express their gratitude and joy for the immeasurable gift of the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. We welcome everyone to join us for the ceremony and for a potluck lunch which follows the Dharma class.

New Year's Eve Meditation Vigil and New Year's Ceremony

The New Year's ceremony provides an opportunity to reflect on the past year and establish a direction for the year ahead. Starting at 9:00 pm on Friday, December 31, there will be meditation at the Priory until 11:30 pm. Then we will hold a New Year's ceremony to offer our gratitude and willingness to the Buddha for the upcoming year. After the ceremony there will be a festive tea in which the Sangha can celebrate the New Year in a peaceful and joyous way.

October 24 Segaki Ceremony

Beginner's Class- January 22 (10am - 12:00pm)

This class is designed to be a follow-up to the basic meditation instruction that we offer every Thursday evening. It will include a short talk on meditation practice, then a period of meditation and then another short talk on bringing mindfulness and compassion into our daily lives. There is no charge for the class but we ask that people register in advance.

Work Day at the Priory

Buddhist Service at the Livermore Unitarian Church

On Sunday, July 25, Mike Lara and Helmut Schatz offered the Priory's short morning service at the Unitarian Universalist Church in Livermore. The Church had expressed interest in having a Buddhist service in connection with their summer interfaith program. In addition to the service, Helmut offered some explanation of the Scripture of Great Wisdom and the Ancestral Line and Mike read the Buddhist story of the Golden Foot to the children. A lively discussion was held after the service with the church members.

Memorials and Naming Ceremonies

Kathleen Wothe's cat, Jenny, had her naming ceremony at the Priory on September 22. A Buddhist naming ceremony involves giving the Three Refuges to the being and pointing them, in this life, towards the Buddha. On September 25, we had a memorial for Alicia Tainer's mother, Mary Lou Sarzoza, who had died on September 1, at the age of 78.

Three Day Meditation Retreats Nov. 18-20 and Jan. 13-15

Retreats are an excellent way to deepen our meditation and training. For the three-day retreats, since many people will not be able to free themselves to be here for all three days, it will be fine to attend these retreats for just one or two days. Please register in advance and let us know which days you can attend.

With Gratitude

Charity is one of the four wisdoms and demonstrates the Bodhisattva's aspiration. Deep appreciation and gratitude is extended to all those who contribute their spiritual practice, money, time, energy, and various gifts to the Priory. The generosity of the entire Priory Sangha is what makes it possible for the Priory to exist and for the Dharma to be offered.

In recent months, we have been given many generous gifts, including a fax machine, electric power strip, laundry detergent, office supplies, fabric, fertilizer, paper goods and many books.

Providing monks with food is the traditional offering given when coming to a Buddhist temple, and we appreciate all the generous food offerings we have been given which provide most of the food for the Priory. Rev. Kinrei has become aware that he is allergic to cow dairy products, so please try not to donate foods with cow dairy in them. Although we are grateful for any gift of food, the most helpful food donations are prepared meals, soy milk, goat milk, fruit, goat or sheep cheese and vegetarian "meats". You are always welcome to ask Rev. Kinrei what is currently needed at the Priory.

A Southern Californian bookstore has offered to try to sell any books that the Priory is given. We encourage Sangha members

and friends to donate any unwanted books on an ongoing basis. A steady stream of books seems to arrive at the Priory and all of these generous donations are earning a considerable amount of money for the Priory. We very much appreciate these gifts of books.

Helping the Priory and Work Days

Buddhist training is based not just on receiving the spiritual nourishment that the Sangha offers us, but also our own willingness to cultivate gratitude and to be willing to find ways to give. Offering our valuable time to help with the work of the Priory is very much needed if the Priory is to flourish. During the past few months, Sangha members came by the Priory and helped with many different tasks, such as gardening, cleaning, cooking, computer work, bookkeeping and laundry. Please contact Rev. Kinrei if you wish to help; the Priory always has plenty of work that needs doing.

In addition, the Priory has been having regular work days which have been a great help with fixing up and maintaining the Priory and its grounds. You are welcome to come to the Priory whenever you can and offer your help. The next work day is scheduled for Saturday, November 27 and Saturday January 29, from 9:30 to 3:00, but we welcome everyone to help for whatever part of the day they can come. Working together as a Sangha is a way of both giving to the Priory and sharing in the brightness of our fellow members of the Sangha. Work days include a lunch at the Priory which is a relaxed meal. Please let us know if you can attend as it is helpful in planning the work.

Shasta Abbey Retreats

Attending a retreat at Shasta Abbey is an excellent way to deepen one's Buddhist life by living and practicing together with a large

community of monastic and lay members of the Sangha. The introductory weekend retreats are the recommended first step in practicing at the Abbey. For more information, you can go to their Web site at www.shastaabbey.org or contact the Shasta Abbey Guestmaster at (530) 926-4208 or at guestmaster@shastaabbey.org.

Introductory Retreats
Nov. 19-21

New Year's Celebratory Retreat
Dec. 28 - Jan. 1

Spiritual Counseling

Rev. Kinrei is available to discuss your spiritual practice and to help you to better apply the Dharma to your life. Taking refuge in a senior member of the Sangha is an important aid in gaining a better perspective and deeper insight into our spiritual life. It is also helpful in learning to cultivate openness and trust. You are welcome to either sign the spiritual counseling sheet on the Priory bulletin board, or call the Priory and arrange a time to meet.

Priory Membership

The Priory has no fees for participating in meditation, Dharma talks, Buddhist services, retreats, spiritual counseling or any other service we offer. We are supported by the donations of our congregation and friends. All gifts of any kind, whether money or materials or labor, are deeply appreciated.

One of the best ways to help the Priory is to make the commitment to be a Priory Member. What this involves is making a pledge to contribute a certain amount of money to the Priory each month. There is no set or recommended amount as we

leave it up to each individual to offer what he or she feels is appropriate. This commitment is a tremendous help to the Priory because it gives us a stable financial base. More importantly, deciding to become a member has deep spiritual significance. It means you are choosing to help take responsibility for the continued existence of the Priory. Some of you may only be able to pledge a few dollars a month and think it is not worth making such an insignificant commitment. Yet it is important to offer whatever you can and be willing to make a formal commitment to be part of the Priory. The most important help members bring to the Priory and the Sangha is not their donations but their Buddhist training. By being willing to come to the Priory and train with others, we help make the Priory a true refuge of the Sangha.

However, we are not suggesting that everyone who occasionally attends the Priory or gives us donations should become a member. For many people, it is not appropriate to make such a commitment, and we welcome them to join us whenever they wish, to help us in the manner they feel appropriate, and to be valued friends of the Priory.

Meditation Instruction

Meditation instruction and an orientation to the practice at the Priory are offered each Thursday at 6:45 pm. The instruction is followed by a 7:30-8:05 pm meditation period. We ask all people new to our practice to attend this instruction. The meditation instruction is free, as are all the activities at the Priory. If your schedule will not allow you to come on Thursday evening, you are welcome to call the Priory to try to arrange a different time for the instruction.