



MOUNTAIN SILENCE

NEWSLETTER OF THE DANCING MOUNTAINS ZEN SANGHA

Issue 5

Spring

Death



Linda Griffiths

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What is death? Is death the opposite of life? What is life?

We hear about death a lot, perhaps more than our ancestors ever did, now that we can find out what is happening all over the globe with the click of a button. But what is it to truly face the inevitability our own death? Or to have been so close to another's death that it has seeped into our bones? Some of us may have only known a handful of people who have died; others more advanced in their years may have lost most of the people they've ever known and loved. But do we know what death is? Can we know about death during this life?

In this edition of Mountain Silence, Reb Anderson Roshi leads us through these questions with striking clarity. While reading his article is a meditation in itself that facilitates a depth of concentration and insight, it also points the way towards integrating this understanding into the day-to-day practice of Zen.

To examine the nature of death as a meditation is to examine the nature of life. When we think about our life superficially we see solid and intractable difficulties, all too familiar habits, stuck relationships. When we examine life deeply in its wondrous and mysterious detail all we can find is a flow of unimpeded change, naturally free of obstacles. The first life is seeking to let go; it's attached and it wants to let go, it's stuck and it wants to be free. The second life is let go. Which one is really our life? Can both find their home in our hearts? Do we have two lives or one?

Later in this edition, Michael Elsmere reviews a book by Ulla-Carin Lindquist, who upon learning of her diagnosis of motor neuron disease, is forced to contemplate her degeneration and eventual death. The perennial questions arise, and in the midst of anguish and uncertainty a peace is finally found. The two lives become one.

So death can be an affirmation of life, rather than standing in opposition to it. But our questions about the nature of death are important ones, and while the vigour of our enquiry determines the depth of insight into our lives, we seek final answers to these questions at our peril.

Final Dance

Bright yellow & black, a wasp, in it's dying time
Grace is it's final dance – slow & rhythmic
Embrace of season's change,
Embodiment of life's dignity

Gentle movements onto a leaf of amber
Then disappearing in to the earth
Continuous in this moment – you and I
With all that is – timeless.

Frances Collins

Mole Dead on a Pole

Out of you darkness
Surely came,
Evolved, dissolved
Into pure light.

Your paradoxical caverns
Womb and tomb
Are minatory, labyrinthine
Leading to sudden
Dead
Ends.

A rusted nail
Struck
Through the spine
Distorts the black
Whilst the silver birch
Offers
A soft lantern to
Your dark dead frame.

Michael Elsmere



Guido Montgomery



Haiku Corner

what was that flurry?
flashing feathers, black white pink.
hoopoes! they are back.

Guido Montgomery

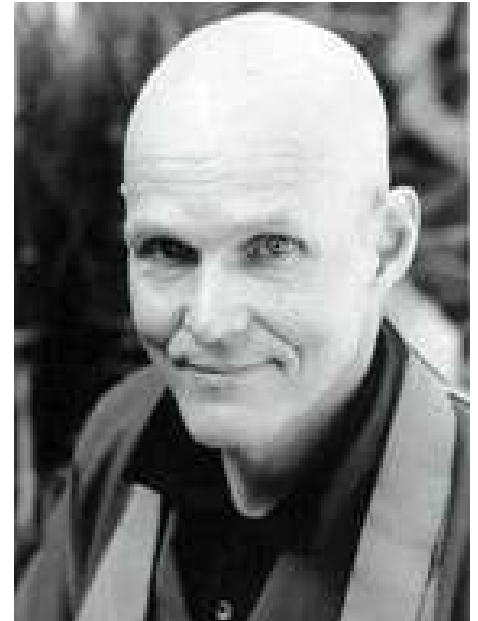
Teachings on Death

A Talk By Reb Anderson Roshi

A talk given at Green Gulch Farm, September 2003.

Transcribed by Frances Collins and edited by Chris Brown.

It seems that life has a superficial version and an ultimate version. These two versions are not really different. One version is where there are birth and death. Another version is where there is life, but there are no birth and no death. There is no birth. It is living without birth. So, of course there is no death. I hope it doesn't sound too disparaging to say that if you live in this superficial type of life where birth and death are appearing, and really believe that that's the way things are, then birth and death can be very miserable. We experience difficulty, not because of birth and death, but because of believing that it is real and attaching to it.



“We experience difficulty, not because of birth and death, but because of believing that it is real and attaching to it.”



Linda Griffiths

Living within the understanding of no birth and no death, and not attaching to that understanding, life is free of suffering, peaceful and harmonious. When we are not attached to this superficial version of life, we can look straight into that world and see where it seems to be being born and dying, and not be caught by it. We can be in that world too with serenity, harmony and freedom. Part of the reason that this would allow us to live in the world of birth and death with serenity, is that we are happy to also let go of the world of nirvana. We are happy to let go of the world of no birth and no death with the understanding that it's not really different to the world of birth and death. They contradict each other but they are not too different entities. They are one entity. Freedom from the world of birth and death is the world of no birth and no death.

There is a meditation practice that has innumerable forms to help beings become free of getting stuck in the superficial version of life, as well as from getting stuck in the profound version of life. People have actually been able to become free of birth and death and get stuck there too.

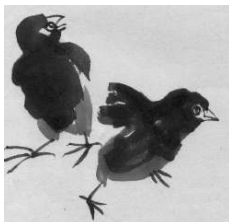
In the history of the tradition of the Buddha some people achieved a state of freedom from birth and death. But they thought that freedom was different from bondage and thereby became stalled in freedom. It stopped being living freedom. The meditation of the Buddha is constantly to move forward in life without attaching even to liberation. To become liberated from liberation is the Buddha's liberation.

Human beings are gifted with the ability to see things inaccurately. We are gifted with inaccurate perception. We see things that don't exist. We see substantial separations where there aren't any substantial separations. We look at situations where there are no birth and no death, where there is just life constantly flowing. But the way we see it is in such a way that we parcel it up, projecting images upon this constantly changing, pulsing, flow of life. It is changing, but it is not dying and it is not being born. We project images upon it so that we can grasp it and talk about it. This projection causes us to grasp it, to seek it, and to seek further grasping. Grasping and seeking in relationship to our life is the illusion of birth and death. We then project images upon those phenomena which result from projecting other images on those. We then cling to those causing further appearance of birth and death, continuing to grasp, hold, and confuse life with misconceptions about the way it is. We apply ideas to the way things are which actually never reaches them, never touches them. This gives us a way to capitalise on them which simultaneously isolates us from life. It doesn't really - but we feel like that. In this way we become frightened of a life which is separate from us and so we do various things to try to make ourselves feel safe within a life that has birth and death; a life with other beings that are separate from us. Part of the way in which we try to make ourselves safe from the world that we have separated ourselves from is to judge that other form of life and see whether it is being nice to us or not. In a world with birth and death, we are constantly trying to judge whether people approve of us or not, and whether they support us or not. This is why it is so uncomfortable in a world with birth and death... sometimes.



Linda Griffiths

“The meditation of the Buddha is constantly to move forward in life without attaching even to liberation.”



Zen practice is offered as a way to become free within birth and death. It is presented as a way of practice which can help us to let go of our misconceptions about what is going on. Even when our conceptions are not misconceptions and they are correct conceptions, they are still conceptions. Even if our conceptions of things are correct conceptions, they are still not the things. So we have misconceptions and we have correct conceptions. Correct conceptions also separate us from things. Misconceptions really distort our understanding of things. We need to learn, somehow, to let go of our conceptual thoughts. Then we have a chance to see the way things ultimately are so that we may become free of birth and death. We may become free of birth and death as well as becoming free of the fear and unskillful actions that arise when we are not free of birth and death.

One way the practice is described is as having two sides. One side is called going to, visiting, or consulting with the teacher and also listening to the teaching. The character for 'listening' can also be translated as 'asking'. It means both listening and asking. So one side of the practice means going to the teacher, listening to the teaching, and consulting or asking about the teaching. The other side is called wholeheartedly sitting. In Zen practice many people practice sitting and do their best to sit wholeheartedly. This room is full of cushions and chairs for people to wholeheartedly sit. Sitting is, then, the exemplary opportunity for realising freedom from birth and death.



“Even if our conceptions of things are correct conceptions, they are still not the things.”



Linda Griffiths

So you wholeheartedly sit, and then when you are ready, you go visit the teacher. Then you listen to the teaching about the sitting that you are trying to wholeheartedly practice. You might tell the teacher about your sitting practice, and the teacher might say that that is your *idea* of sitting. That is not actually the sitting. It is the superficial image of the sitting. It is the form of the sitting - you got that right. But you haven't reached the actual sitting that is beyond your idea of sitting. Then you listen to the talk about that. You listen and you ask questions. Over some time your understanding of the sitting evolves to such a point that you become free of your ideas of the sitting, while you still have ideas of the sitting. You also understand how you need to have ideas of the sitting in order to become free of your ideas of the sitting. You understand how there wouldn't be any sitting if you didn't have ideas of the sitting. But if you attach to the ideas of the sitting, you don't reach the actual sitting. In this way you listen to the teacher about sitting. Then you go and sit. Then you ask the teacher questions about the sitting. Then you go sit. You go back and forth like that until one day you start to understand what sitting is. When you understand what sitting is, you are a Buddha.

When you can understand a little bit about what sitting is, you can make great strides in addition to your idea of sitting. I guess most of you have some idea of sitting. Almost no one is reclining or standing. It seems to me that you somehow got in to sitting postures. Superficially I see that you used the idea of sitting to arrive at the sitting. Sometimes you go to see the teacher with a bunch of other people. Sometimes two hundred people listen to the teacher talk about sitting. Sometimes you go in groups of fifteen or three. Sometimes you go all by yourself. Sometimes there is no teacher in the room with you but you are remembering what the teacher said and remembering what you read in the Scriptures which tell you about the nature of the sitting practice. But the correct understanding of sitting applies to every experience and phenomena. We just use the sitting as a traditional ceremony for the study of everything. You could use anything to study. When you first meet a teacher you should just wholeheartedly sit and thus body and mind drop away.

Actually even before you meet a teacher, body and mind thus drop away. Zen meditation is body and mind thus dropping away. I have a body and mind that thinks that you have a body and mind, or a bodymind complex. Zen meditation then is the way that your bodymind is dropping off. That is actually going on right now. Zen meditation is actually happening right now for each of us. It is the way your body and mind are actually working together and moving forward on the path of life. You do not have to make your body and mind drop away. It is dropping away. It is dropping away even without being born and dying. It is constantly liberating itself by its true nature. You do not have to make that happen. But in fact you do make it happen because that's the way you are. You are actually dropping away what you actually are. So what? That way that you are, is free. Seeing and understanding the way you are liberates you from other versions of the way you are which, if you believe them, will not make you feel free.

“When you first meet a teacher you should just wholeheartedly sit and thus body and mind drop away.”



We are gifted with the ability to see a bodymind that is not dropping away. Believing the image that the mind creates of a bodymind that is not dropping away and is not constantly liberating by its true nature, makes it hard for us to see and understand how we are actually constantly being liberated from being stuck. I don't recommend that you pretend to feel unstuck when you feel stuck. I think it is good when you feel stuck to say that you feel stuck. I suggest that your ability to say you feel stuck is because you're not. Everything that you do is sponsored by your freedom, including your inability to say that you feel stuck or lying that you feel free when you actually feel stuck.

“...your ability to say you feel stuck is because you're not.”

“...wholehearted sitting is body and mind dropping away.”

Now I am playing the role of teacher and telling you about your body and mind. I am telling you that the sitting you are doing right now is actually Zen meditation and that the way of Zen meditation is the way that your body and mind are dropping off. Right now I am talking and some of you are listening to the teaching about body and mind and wholehearted sitting. Again, I say wholehearted sitting is body and mind dropping away. The price of admission to wholehearted sitting is to let go of the story that your body and mind are not dropping away, and also to let go of the story that your body and mind are dropping away. So when I tell you a story about your body and mind constantly sloughing itself off and expressing its freedom, that also deserves being released... and it will be.

I am talking for the purpose of encouraging wholehearted sitting in each of us. To encourage the practice of wholehearted sitting is actually the way we already are. At the same time our wholehearted life graciously allows us to grasp our fantasies about ourselves as being who we are. Then it allows us to feel out of touch with our freedom. Our freedom is real. Our bondage is not. If bondage was real that would be that, and Buddhism should close down shop! But it is freedom that is real and freedom goes with happiness and great compassion for other beings who are not separate from the freedom, but who have not yet accepted it. The inability to accept the freedom goes with the inability to let go of our story about what is happening. Freedom is not necessarily *not* having any stories, but it is necessary to let go of them. Sometimes when you let go of them for a while you don't have any. It's not exactly that they had been destroyed, but you are just temporarily holding them, and you are looking at the fact of letting go of the story and not having to grab another one yet. So you are looking at no story.



Linda Griffiths

“Our freedom is real. Our bondage is not.”

When you are looking at no story you are looking at life without something that you can grasp which is like nothing you have ever seen so you don't know what to call it. So it is like nothing. But it's not nothing. It is just none of the things that you usually see. You were actually looking at life now unpackaged. But life unpackaged looks like none of the packages. It looks like no eyes, no nose, no tongue, no body, no mind, no colour, no sound, no taste, no objects of mind, no feelings, no emotions, no intentions, no ideas. It looks like that.

This is hard to get used to and that's why you have to go and talk to the teacher sometimes to see that you are okay. Before I came to Zen Centre I wasn't as advanced as what I have just talked about. But I was having experiences and I didn't know if they were advanced or if I needed help from a doctor. I didn't know if I should go on TV or go and see a psychiatrist. So I wanted to go and talk to a Zen teacher to see if what I was experiencing was okay and part of the course.



Linda Griffiths

We say that my body and mind lacks any essence, but my mind projects an image of an essence onto it. So I think it does and therefore I am in birth and death. Ultimately my body has no form and no characteristic that makes my body, my body. There is nothing about my body that makes my body, my body. My body is empty of a character by which it is a body. But I see it as if there were a character that makes the body. There is no such thing and yet I imagine it. My body does not produce itself. It is not independent. I project an image onto it that it is independent, but it is not independent. It depends on things other than itself to exist. My body ultimately cannot be found to exist. It has no essence. If you look for your body you can find some things but you will never find your body. You can look for your eyes but you won't find your eyes. Superficially you can find them. But in the final analysis if you look deeply you will not be able to find anything to exist. Although you will not be able to find anything existing this does not mean that nothing exists. It just means that the way things are is that they are unfindable. Part of the difficulty about becoming free is that we have to see the difference between things not existing and not being able to find them existing. The way that they exist is that they cannot be found. Therefore they are in a state of freedom from the start and naturally beyond any way to suffer.

“...the way things are is that they are unfindable.”

But if we project an essence onto things, like in a packaging mode, then there can be suffering. In this wonderful universe suffering has been born by the mind. Mind apprehends the universe in such a way as to make suffering possible. The stars, as far as I know, are not suffering. The moon is not suffering. The wind is not suffering. They have no way to suffer because they have no way to project limiting ideas onto things that misconstrue their existence. We like to be able to find things! If we can't find things we can't talk about them. If we can't talk about them, we have to go to speech therapy. We are human beings and therefore we have to be able to talk about life. But in order to talk about life, and in order to talk about our sitting, we have to project a form onto it. We have to grab that form as though that were the sitting. Then we can talk about it and we can suffer.

“The stars, as far as I know, are not suffering.”

“You can't reach the principle without the grasping that doesn't reach the principle.”

In order to be a sitting Buddha we must grasp the form of sitting. You can't sit with out grasping the characteristic of sitting and there is no characteristic of sitting. There is no characteristic by which sitting becomes sitting. But we can't sit without grasping the form, the mark, the characteristic of sitting. As we are sitting as Buddhas, or Buddha becoming people, we cannot avoid grasping the form of sitting. Although this doesn't make sitting actually sitting, we do have to do that. Simultaneously, we hear the teaching that this grasping at the form of sitting does not reach the liberating principle of what sitting is. Grasping the form of sitting, sitting can be really great. It can also be not so good. It can be wonderful, but it can't be really wonderful, in certain ways, unless you grasp it. Even then, it cannot reach the liberating principle of body and mind sitting. But you cannot reach the liberating principle of body and mind sitting in meditation unless you grasp the form of sitting which does not reach the principle of sitting. You can't reach the principle without the grasping that doesn't reach the principle. If you are dealing with what I have said right now, that is the practice of dealing with wholehearted sitting. It is the practice of body and mind dropping away. There is no body and mind dropping away without grasping at body and mind that doesn't reach the principle by which body and mind drop away. We have to work with this dynamic. When you are already sitting you have not failed to grasp the mark of sitting. In that way that you are able to sit, stand, walk or swim in meditation it does not reach the principle that you need to reach in order to be free. Realising that at that time realises freedom. You let go of your conceptual activity. When you're finally wholeheartedly sitting and you think you have let go of that conceptual activity, and finally realise dropping of body and mind, you're doing the practice in which you realise that this has always been your life. There wasn't even a beginning to this and you see that this life wasn't even born.

Roshi Reb Anderson

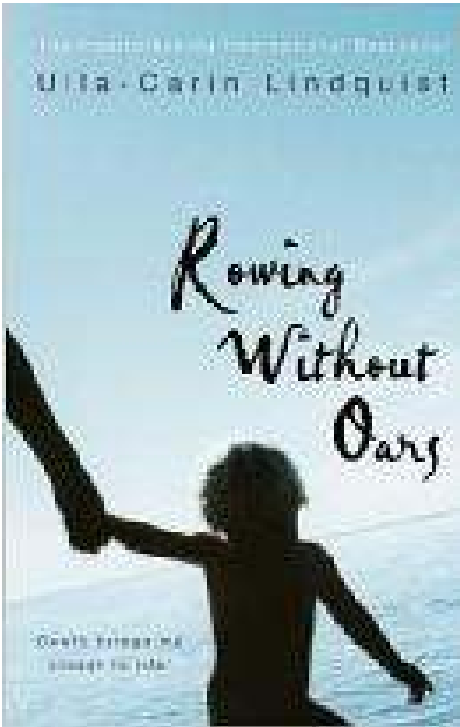
Rowing Without Oars

By Ulla-Carin Lindquist

Translated by Margaret Myers

ISBN 0-7195-6686-X

Review by Michael Elsmere



In the Tibetan Book of Living and Dying, Chapter 2: "On Impermanence," Sogyal Rinpoche quotes the great French philosopher Montaigne. "We do not know when death awaits us so let us wait for it everywhere. To practice death is to practice freedom. A person who has learned to die has unlearned how to be a slave."

I lived for ten years in Sweden. Sometimes during the long, dark winter evenings as part of my attempts to learn Swedish I would sit down and watch the news on SVT the public service channel, their equivalent of BBC. Often the news would be read by the woman who was to become the best selling author of the book "Rowing Without Oars". Ulla-Carin Lindquist was a woman who apparently had everything, balancing a very successful high flying career in television, married to one of the country's top surgeons, the mother of four children. It all began innocuously enough when she was drinking soup in a restaurant on Boulevard St. Laurent in Montreal Canada. Her spoon unaccountably wobbled and the soup spilled. How did that happen? A year later she was rowing against the tide towards their summerhouse with her husband sitting in the stern:

The oars are as heavy as lead as though they were frozen into the water.

"I can't row."

"What's the matter with you? You have no strength in your muscles any longer."

This vibrant athletic woman is humiliated, feels close to tears. In a moment of intuition Olle, her surgeon husband, suddenly apprehends that something is wrong, terribly wrong. As her hectic life as a mother, as a wife, as a TV journalist and presenter races on the doctors build on their diagnoses as they probe body and brain in a series of ever more complex scans in a range of advanced scanning machines. Despite the twitches and the sudden losses of balance she still determinedly skis.

On her fiftieth birthday it is confirmed that she has Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) an aggressive and incurable motor neuron disease that kills fifty percent of sufferers within 18 months of diagnosis. Her ten-year old son Pontus bursts out, "Mummy I don't want you to die before me."

She asks:

Why am I being punished?

(The English word 'pain', comes from the Greek word 'poine' which means punishment.)

*Who can sail without wind?
Who can row without oars?
Who can leave a loved one
without tears?*

*I can sail without wind.
I can row without oars.
But I cannot leave my loved
ones without tears.*

Anon. Traditional Swedish
Folk Song.

Her neurologist says in answer to her direct questions that she has one or two years at most. "It depends on your respiratory function which is most critically affected by ALS."

Later in her journal:

I see this in a positive light, however banal this sounds. I have to live in the immediate present. I feel moments of great joy.

As the disease progresses:

ALS has deprived me of the spoken word! My speech. The tool of my trade.

Fury

This suffering can be my strength.

So many words are used to fill emptiness. Words are putty to fill cracks. To keep the darkness away and the lies alive.

As she tells her children the true extent of her illness her young son Gustaf asks, "What's it going to be like in a year?"

Emptiness. Time stops. My throat tightens. His eyes are like ponds, my son is waiting.

"I'll probably be dead."

"Now I want to tell you about the stone age," he says.

Later:

"Mummy, every second is a life."

"What did you say?"

"Every second is a life."

"Where have you heard that?"

"Nowhere, I just made it up."

From my 23 year old daughter Ulrica born between the snowdrop and the crocus: "I know you will always live in me. When I have problems or feel anxious you will always be there to advise me."

A friend speaks to me about two paths; that of fear and that of love. We talk about tasting the darkness. "I can exist in the darkness but I am not my darkness I am so very much more."

In a letter from Carin my younger daughter now just 21: "In your dying you teach me how to live.....There is an eagle in every soul..... You teach me how frail life is...."

A question to you all: what is death?

Water gave me birth. The sea is the source of primordial power it sustains me. The sea will sustain you too my children. The wind rows me out and I am at peace. Every second is a life.

Ulla Carin died in March 2004.



Linda Griffiths

***“Every second
is a life.”***

When buddhas are truly buddhas they do not necessarily notice they are buddhas.

Genjo Koan
Dogen Zenji

Translated by Kazuaki
Tanahashi

No Path at All!

by John Crook
from the "Sermons to the Stones and Trees" tapes
Summer 1992

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There comes a moment in Zen training, a moment both shocking and surprising, when one realises intuitively that there is no path at all.

Ho! What then is Zen practice? Practice is the realisation that there is no path at all, yet one keeps on going, going on, going on beyond, always becoming being.

Listening to a talk on Buddhism on the radio I heard speaker after speaker extolling in his or her own way, the advantages and benefits of Buddhism. Here, it would seem, is a club well worth belonging to! The beginner joins the Buddhists, she finds a new identity, becomes a newly enrolled member. There is a certain relief in belonging.

“We find it hard to get out of our culturally determined emphasis on competition and individualism.”

“However benevolent we think we are, all clubs are exclusive.”

In a lonely world, clubs have a certain value. Whether it be in a city, a small town or in the countryside there are many reasons for starting a club. Most of all we want some sort of togetherness, some feeling of travelling to a destination that offers some security, some way out of the morass in which our society is stuck, some way beyond the alienation, heartlessness, criminality and carelessness. Some explanation to make it all feel safer.

So we have clubs, lists of members, buy a building, set up a programme, invite speakers, cajole the reluctant, persuade the unbelievers, reject those who come once and never again. We appoint a secretary, president officials and obedientaries, find ourselves spiritual advisers. Something like a lay monastery gets set up in our midst and we start worrying about membership, payment of subscriptions, the next speaker. Soon some of us begin to wonder whether the spiritual adviser in the town along the way might not be better for us than the one we've got. After all what's s/he doing for us?

A year has gone by and I haven't changed! A hint of divisiveness creeps into the air. Democracy and muddle might be better, more modern, than faith and authority: yet which is right for the times? Do we even know enough to judge?

However benevolent we think we are, all clubs are exclusive. Social psychology tells us that even minimalist groups discover adversaries. If you split an encounter group for half an hour you can easily generate factions. Belonging to one's club, one has a distinctive path, a distinctive teacher. Certainly we have a better practice than those along the way who only sit, pray, talk, sing mantras, have intellectual interests, follow a guru, dance all night or sleep with one another - and so on. Otherwise why join this group rather than the other. Anyway I am investing in it. It had better be good.

Krishnamurti told us repeatedly that creating institutions is divisive. Amongst Western Buddhists this remains subtly, even dishonestly, so. We find it hard to get out of our culturally determined emphasis on competition and individualism. Yet even Western Buddhists don't usually throw stones at one another, at least not very accurately. Dharma gossip is the secret vehicle for dissent, disappointment, frustration irritation, thinking oneself important or merely put in one's place. And the more I am a proven party member the more addicted I become and the more divisive are my biased thoughts. Even Krishnamurti could not stop his followers following. What would he have done if he had?

“Clubs are only as good as the self awareness of the members.”

There are dangers here; following the way of the club you may miss the Buddha's message entirely. As he lay dying he said "All component things pass away. Work out your own salvation with diligence." He did not say "Set up churches!" He did not say "Wear robes, dog collars, create ranks and files, make yourself distinctive. Let it be known who is the wise and who is the unwise". He did not say "Argue your case with the Muslims, the Christians, the Marxists." He simply said "All component things pass away. Go Work out your salvation with diligence. Find out for yourself!".

The creation of an outer path is easy. Creating our clubs, we need to examine what is happening to us in the heart. What is the quality of our relationships when we meet. Is it beneficial for us all? Do we pass our merit, if any, on to others? Do we share? Do we give as well as take? Do we focus on the faults and peculiarities of our teachers or do we sometimes manage to catch glimpses of what it is they are trying to convey to us. However irritating or adorable, a teacher who has received transmission may well have something to tell us that goes beyond words. Can we catch the hidden meaning?

We, who so naturally form clubs, need to understand our motivation for doing so. We need to know not what we can get but what we can give. Do we persist in participation when we join or do we just have a look around and then run off somewhere else where the tea is stronger or the teacher more sexy? What is our level of understanding in all this? Clubs are only as good as the self awareness of the members.

“Creating our clubs, we need to examine what is happening to us in the heart.”

It is always good to look at what is happening in the heart, to place it there in zazen and wait until one can see it truly. Don't be in a rush.

One evening in 1986 I was standing on the mountain path above the little monastery of Bo-Lam on Lantau Island in Hong Kong. I was looking at the full moon rising over the forested mountains and the distant ocean. As I watched, a monk came down the path returning from his work constructing stone by stone and rock by rock an extension to the mountain track. Smiling I pointed to the moon. He looked at me and gently shook his head. Extending his hand in the air, he seemed to grasp the moon out of the sky and in one movement placed it in his heart. He smiled. I bowed. As he walked on, he shrugged his shoulders.

If one looks to external things, there is only the path of following. Taking the moon and placing it in the heart is the same as taking the atmosphere of a room or temple into oneself, discovering the uniqueness of the presence of the moment. Breathing in the air, the sound and feel, the ambience of the place becomes one with an inner being, the quiet space where there are no judgments.

When the spirit of place simply hangs in the air about you and you go deeply into it, you will find there is no need to move. There is nothing particular to know. There is no need for elaboration. It is as it is. Even if there is something to be done in due course; in that moment of reflection, when the thing is in the heart, there is nothing to be done. Just see it as it is. Maybe you will see it as you have never seen it before. Now it is Soho, now it is SOHO, yet now it is Soho once more. Was it Soho that changed? Can the flag blow the wind?

“Salvation with diligence is an inner matter which only gradually takes on external expression.”

Out of moments of tranquillity comes all that you need. When the opposites arise, Dogen tells us, the Buddha mind is lost. When you try to create Buddhism on a path that is outside the heart then the Buddha mind gets lost too. Be wary of officious Buddhists or those with opinions. Look more closely. Salvation with diligence is an inner matter which only gradually takes on external expression. This happens naturally without artifice. There is nothing you can do about this. If you become clear, others will notice it. There is nothing for you to proclaim. Take the opposites and place them in the heart, let the molten moon dissolve in the blood stream. The evening air comes naturally in on the breath.

There is no path and you will never know an end to it.

*Homage to the Buddhas of All Worlds.
Homage to the Bodhisattvas of All Worlds.
Homage to the Scriptures of Great Wisdom.*

“If one looks to external things, there is only the path of following.”

Obituary

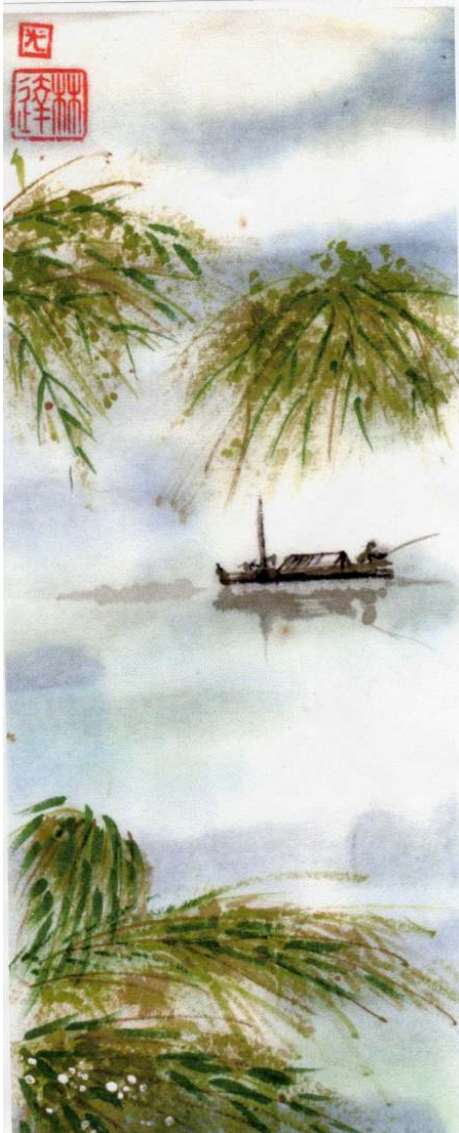
Venerable Master Sheng Yen

It is with great sadness that Dancing Mountains announces the death of Venerable Master Sheng Yen, who passed away peacefully on February 2nd 2009 at Dharma Drum Mountain's Founder's Quarters in his monastery in Taiwan.

Master Sheng Yen's health had been deteriorating over the course of the three years until his passing, living with great bodily weakness due to poor kidney function. His health temporarily improved towards the latter half of 2008, and Sheng Yen was able to give lectures and attend public events during this time. Yet, towards the end of 2008 his health declined rapidly, despite daily prayer vigils in the hope that transferring the merit would help him to regain his health.



Venerable Master Sheng Yen



Linda Griffiths

As a deeply thinking Chan Master, Sheng Yen at times himself guided his followers as to the nature of life and death. Here are some examples:

"When we talk about the issue of life and death, most people cherish life, but dislike death. However, from the perspective of Chan, life and death are inseparable - they are actually the same thing."

...

"So what is life? Life is the boundless extension of limitless brightness. If one practices and makes good use of every lifetime that one has, then one will be adding to this brightness, and that is the boundless extension."

...

"Most people think of life as beginning when a baby's born and ending when a person dies. But that is not an entirely correct understanding of life. The existence of the physical body is actually only the expression of the function of life. So one should understand life as having two components, the physical and the spiritual. Without the physical body, the spiritual aspect of life would have no way of expressing itself, but the physical body does not represent the entirety of life. The physical body exists for some limited period of time, but the spiritual component of life exists forever."

Diary of Events

2009

Every Monday

Glastonbury Chan/Zen Group meet at Shekinashram 7:00pm
Phone: Devin, 01749 813969

Every Tuesday

Totnes Zen Group meet at different locations 6:15pm
Phone: Francis 01803 866735 or Michael 01803 732761

Monthly:

Dharma Discussion Group:

Email: Alan,
woodap@btinternet.com

May

Sun 31 May: A combined Thich Nhat Hanh and *DM retreat
Bare Foot Barn, Chagford
Michael Elsmere
01803 732761 / 07817 604156
melsmere@hotmail.com

July

Sun 5 July: *DM

Zen Retreat in Ermington, Devon.
Phone: Devin 07875 155464
devin@zendesigns.org

Sun 12th July : South Devon Chan day retreat

Leusdon Memorial Hall near Poundsgate in Dartmoor
Pete Lowry
07737 526048

August

Fri 28 Aug - Fri 4 Sept: *DM

7 Day Retreat: Reb Anderson

Gaia House, Devon, England
generalenquiries@gaiahouse.co.uk Phone:
01626 333613

October

Sun 4 Oct: Chan day retreat

At Shekinashram, Glastonbury.
Email: reiter@clara.co.uk
Phone: Ned, 01458 832931

*DM Indicates that the retreat is either using the Dancing Mountains Liturgy or is led by a priest in the Lineage of Suzuki

Challenge yourself!

Tricycle Magazine's "The Big Sit"

The American Buddhist Review Tricycle is running a 90 day Zen Meditation 'Challenge'.

To participate you commit to:

- Sit in formal meditation for 20 minutes each day for 90 days
- Listen to one dharma talk on tricycle.com
- Study Dogen's Genjo Koan
- Commit to the sixteen bodhi-sattva precepts
- Practice with others or your sangha

Begin when you like!

(The official start was 23 Feb)

Lots of extras and information at www.tricycle.com

To read the Genjo Koan, visit the Dancing Mountains web-site at www.dancingmountains.org.uk

Ads

Incense £6

Japanese incense as used and sold at San Francisco Zen Center.

Phone: Devin, 07875 155464

Sutra books

Sutra books are now available for people who would like to learn our chants. £8 for the full liturgy as used at San Francisco Zen Center.

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Next issue of Mountain Silence

Summer issue with a theme around Art and Creativity.

We welcome your articles, poetry, pictures, letters and book reviews! Summer issue publication date: 21st July, deadline for submission of material 21st June.

With thanks to: Reb Anderson Roshi and San Francisco Zen Center; the editorial team, Michael, Chris, Gill, Frances, Francis, Devin and everyone who has contributed to the newsletter and supported and encouraged us in our devotion and practice.

THIS ISSUE AND BACKISSUES OF MOUNTAIN SILENCE ARE ALSO AVAILABLE ON THE WEB:

www.dancingmountains.org.uk