

## **The Berkeley Buddhist Priory Newsletter April - May, 2003**

### **The Use Of The Will Rev. Master Daishin Morgan**

(This article first appeared in the Autumn 1987 issue of The Journal of Throssel Hole Buddhist Priory.)

There is a recurrent theme that crops up in spiritual counselling concerning difficulties in training. People will say, "I have difficulty with...." After talking with them for a while about this difficulty, they move on to another subject and begin, "Well, I also have difficulty with...." Sometimes there is no end to the number of things a person "has difficulty with." I am not complaining about the fact that people wish to talk about what troubles them, but I am pointing to the need to keep a watch on the overall way in which the "difficulties" are approached, since this approach is usually closer to the heart of the problem than the particular difficulty complained of.

A good example of this is when someone who has been meditating for a while comes and says, "I have a lot of difficulty with wandering thoughts." This is a common enough problem and there is nothing wrong in asking about it. However, it is the response to the reply that I am concerned with. The reply is that you have to disengage yourself from the thoughts, let them go, and come back to sitting still. The person then responds by saying how hard he or she finds it to do this, and I reply I never said it was easy! We may then go on to talk about a problem of resentment and I point out how anger is continued by

running over and over in our minds how justified we are to be angry, what we will do about it, how dare the guilty party do what he did . . . and on and on. I point out that this cycle of thought is not necessary; one can let it go and be still within the anger that arises. The same is true if the problem happens to be fear, despair, greed, or anything else. A key factor in training is the need to be still in the midst of suffering.

A lot of people respond to this teaching by continuing to say how difficult it is, thereby demonstrating that they do not believe they really can let go of the troublesome thoughts. The reason for pointing this out is that it can be helpful to become aware of a habitually negative approach to the Teaching. This negativity arises from a disbelief in one's Buddha Nature. Because there is doubt, the person does not really believe he or she can let go of the thoughts or be still within the anger. The only solution is to cut through all the doubt and actually let go of the thought processes and be still. To do this is an act of faith, an act that requires the individual to use his or her will. Quite often spiritual counseling is sought as a substitute for using one's own will in the hope that there may be some other solution. Well, I can tell you there is no substitute. Sooner or later you have to get fed up enough with the way things are and do something about it.

Within meditation, people are often afraid to use the will. They wrongly assume that using the will reinforces the self and so they shy away from it. Those who meditate can also be afraid of karmic consequence. They understand that every act has a corresponding reaction and think that any mistake they make will be exacerbated by a deliberate use of the will, apparently believing that the consequences of being indecisive and flaccid are preferable.

The use of the will is also inhibited by the fear of repression. We have all been brought up on the horrors of what happens when emotions are repressed and, without adequately investigating what this means, we apply the theory to areas it was never intended for. You will not repress something that you are aware of and wish to do something about. Repression is the opposite of meditation: it is to deny what goes on in the heart and mind. In meditation, whatever arises is accepted and acknowledged, but it does not end there. The problem will continue as long as you keep providing the conditions that enable it to grow. You have to choose to stop it, and to do this you have to exercise the will. If you are serious about wanting to meditate, the effect will be to gradually allow anything that has been repressed to come to the surface. Once it does, you then have to choose what to do about it: either to indulge in it or to let it go, and there is no letting go without the use of the will.

What people often do, however, is to put their energy into complaining about how hard it is without realizing that this is to actively use the will to go in the wrong direction. Be aware of the complaints that go on in your head and let them go as well! When there are no longer any excuses, you confront the bare facts of the matter and can see what you are doing.

Offering spiritual counselling can often be like trying to tame a wild and frightened animal--it keeps trying to bolt down the nearest hole. You block the hole by pointing out that it is no real refuge and so the person then bolts for another hole. It is a great day when someone comes for advice and is not looking for a bolt-hole but is willing to stand still in the open and face whatever comes.

To exercise the will, when done correctly, is the

manifestation of the Mind that seeks the Way, the will to enlightenment. The will is not something right or wrong. Its misuse will certainly lead to suffering, but if you fear its misuse, you end up choosing to be indecisive and thereby end up misusing the will by default! If you are afraid to create karma, you will never get very far in your training. Understand that karma itself is teaching; if you try to do what is right but get it wrong, then the consequences will show you what went wrong.

To use the will correctly it must be used within the context of the Precepts. If your intention is to cease from evil, do only good, and do good for others, then although your use of the will may at times be misguided, it will never be evil. The truth is that there is no escape, no bolt-hole in which you can hide from the fact that you are responsible for whatever you choose to do, whether that choice is made by default, out of fear, or with your head in a fog. To ignore this is the root cause of suffering. It is therefore better to act with a sincere heart, and possibly make a mistake, than to do nothing in the delusion that you will thereby avoid unpleasant consequences. We are here in this life to learn, and learning can be painful. Accept that pain, for you will not avoid it, and then being in this world becomes a means to enlightenment.

## **Memorials**

A memorial was held for Rosa Centenaro on March 2. Rosa was a longtime member of the Priory Sangha who died two years ago. It was good to have the chance to remember Rosa and offer our merit to her.

**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. The Priory is solely supported through the donations of its congregation and friends and there is deep appreciation for this willingness to support the temple and Rev. Kinrei.

In recent months, we have been given many generous gifts. A car was given to the Priory, a 1998 Honda Civic, which replaces the twenty year old Volvo station wagon which has been a durable car but getting very worn. The Volvo still has a life with the Sangha as it went with Rev. Meido to eastern Oregon. We were also given a beautiful painting of the Buddha's footprints which will find a grateful home at the Priory. In addition we were given cassette tapes, tools, hardware, plants, paper goods, cleaning supplies, office supplies, and many, 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. All the very generous and deeply appreciated donations of food provide most of the needs of the Priory. Rev. Kinrei has become aware that he is allergic to dairy products, so please try not to donate foods with dairy in them. Although we are grateful for any gift of food, the most helpful food donations are prepared meals, soy milk, fruit, tofu, and vegetarian "meats". You are always welcome to ask Rev. Kinrei what is currently needed at the Priory.

A Southern California Sangha member with a 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 and the deep generosity in the willingness to sell them.