

The Berkeley Buddhist Priory Newsletter June - August, 2003

Death of Rev. Master Daizui MacPhillamy Thoughts on his life and death Rev. Kinrei Bassis

The Great Silence enfolds the world. Who could have guessed its tenderness?

On April 4, Rev. Master Daizui MacPhillamy, the Head of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives, died at Shasta Abbey from lymphoma. He found out that he had the cancer in December. His treatment this winter with chemotherapy seemed to be effective but in the middle of March Rev. Master became very ill. He went for treatment to a Redding hospital and they found that the cancer had spread and after having various tests, treatments and surgeries, it became clear that the cancer was not treatable. Rev. Master left the hospital in Redding during the morning of April 4 and went back to Shasta Abbey. He seemed very happy to be back home and then, just a few hours later, he died peacefully. He was 57 years old.

Rev. Master's body was cremated on April 8, in a large cemetery in Redding. There were about eighty monks and lay people at the crematorium. It was a moving mixture of ceremonies and meditation as his body was being transformed into ashes.

The Priory held a memorial ceremony for Rev. Master Daizui

on Sunday, April 13. Among his many offerings to the Sangha, Rev. Master Daizui had spent a number of months as Prior of the Berkeley Buddhist Priory. They were a very significant time both for him and for our Sangha as it was during that time that Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett had the deep spiritual experiences that became the basis for her book, How to Grow a Lotus Blossom. Rev. Master Jiyu dedicated the book to Rev. Master Daizui, writing, "This book is dedicated to the disciple who risked his health to save mine."

All of us in this Sangha have a deep debt of gratitude for all that Rev. Master Daizui's deep spiritual training has given us. First of all, Rev. Master Daizui was an assistant to Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett from 1978 until her death in 1996. His wise and skillful ways of helping her was an immense service both to Rev. Master Jiyu and to the well being of the Sangha and he gave an excellent example of a true disciple's deep devotion to their Master.

Rev. Master Daizui was elected by the monks of the Order to succeed Rev. Master Jiyu as the Head of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives after her death in 1996. I was always impressed by his wisdom and skill at dealing with all different problems and personalities in our varied Sangha which now stretches across many different countries. The great gift of the Sangha is harmony and I am very grateful for the non judgmental way that Rev. Master Daizui approached the different outlooks within the Sangha and found harmonious ways for us to train. He showed his wisdom in not just seeing the opposites in the problems he faced but in seeing the Heart of Buddha shining like a golden thread moving through everyone's spiritual life.

The depth of Rev. Master Daizui's spiritual training was exhibited in the calm and accepting way he approached his cancer and then his dying. He used modern medicine to do all he could to cure himself but he placed his life in the hands of the Buddha and trusted the unfolding of his karma. I was privileged to spend time with him during his last few days of life, while he was in a hospital in Redding, California. It was very moving and powerful spiritual teaching to see how bright and accepting he was of everything that was happening. His hospital room became a meditation hall with a number of monks and laypeople sitting with him throughout the day and night. The peace and serenity flowing from Rev. Master Daizui was an example of the way the deepest teachings in Buddhism are conveyed without words.

I do not try to measure the offerings of this life; I am content to know, "It is enough".

Rev. Master Daizui

Clearing Away Emotions That Obscure the Truth

Rev. Master Jisho Perry (Published in the Nov.-Dec. 1997 Santa Barbara Priory Newsletter. Rev. Master Jisho recently re-edited this article.)

With the eradication of the two obscurations, thus fulfilling the purpose of having gained a human form, unsurpassable full awakening will be achieved. The way in which we attain ultimate realization is by clearing away the two obscurations that prevent insight into the true nature of reality. These are the obscurations of emotional afflictions and the obscuration

to the knowledge of everything. The former prevents freedom from the forces of cyclic existence, the later prevents the omniscience of Buddhahood. We begin actually to eliminate them only when we have advanced well into practice.

If we do not at least try to lessen the force of emotional afflictions, the grosser of these two obscurations, we may not experience happiness and peace of mind even if all the external circumstances for material well-being are present.... In order to make life truly meaningful, we must work inwardly.... Most intelligent people recognize that they are constantly under the sway of various emotions often leading to psychological conflict. If we are intent on following a spiritual path but do not try to reduce these obstructions, our approach is basically superficial. However, we cannot become enlightened in one day. Our mind is like an onion, and each day and month of practice progressively peels away the layers of delusion. Finally, one day we reach the insubstantial essence and are fully aware of our true nature....

Fundamentally, to practice Dharma means to integrate the essence of the teachings into our daily life by trying to make others, as well as ourselves, happy. If we fail to do this, then even receiving teachings through visionary states of mind would be meaningless, since the words and teachings are nothing but a means to change our attitude.¹

How can we clear away these emotional obscurations? To clean up old karma or clear away emotional obscurations does not mean we no longer have any feelings or that the emotions are bad or wrong. What is important here is to understand that emotionality is another word for old karma. When we are born, our emotional computer is--as it were--programmed by former actions. The law of karma is the law

of cause and effect in a moral and spiritual realm. Actions based on greed, anger, or any of the manifold delusions of self, create feelings of suffering. The suffering we experience through our emotions are the result of actions based on ignorance. Our spiritual purpose is to convert or change the impulses toward greed, fear, anger and delusion into actions based on compassion, love and wisdom.

In The Scripture of Avalokiteshwara, the Buddha describes how the Bodhisattva of Compassion appears in any situation where one feels threatened, if we are willing to ask for help and open the Heart of Compassion. In meditation we are learning to continually bring the mind back to a place of stillness and peace. When strong emotional reactions arise because we feel threatened, we can train ourselves to bring the mind back to a place within the Heart that is undisturbed no matter how threatened we may feel. When we choose to simply experience the arisen emotion, neither acting on it nor pushing it away, old karma is converted or cleaned up. As a general rule one does not clean up old karma when one is relaxed, happy, and everything else in life is going well. Spiritual progress usually begins when we experience suffering and commit ourselves to removing the emotional obscurations, or karmic blockages, in difficult or threatening situations: we commit ourselves not to react with anger or fear, to refrain from hurting ourselves or another. We actively make the choice not to steal, or act on greed, meanness or jealousy.

By seeking the Heart of Compassion when we feel threatened, very real solutions to the problems of suffering will arise naturally. One of the layers of the onion is peeled away; we learn to have freedom of choice. We can choose to sit still and keep the Precepts when we feel a strong desire to carry on an old karmically conditioned emotional

reaction. This is true spiritual responsibility and the freedom that the Buddhist Scriptures refer to. It is the freedom to change our attitudes, our actions and the results we will, thereafter, receive. Because we access true freedom when we feel threatened or angry, it may seem to many that they would prefer not to have to feel threatened or angry at all. Reality, however, presents all human beings with unavoidable suffering. To convert this suffering into deep understanding, or compassionate wisdom, is the very purpose for which we are born. The Prince Siddhartha saw illness, old age and death and felt the suffering within them. Then he saw a monk. All of these sights raised the seed of Compassion in his Heart to find a cure for the existence of suffering.

The emotions obscure the Heart of Compassion, and yet are the means we have of finding It. If we can realize that despair, annoyance, anger, and fear can be used to help us find the Truth and live at peace within our true home, then there is no need to avoid them. "When one is truly one with wisdom great, the obstacles dissolve." This is literally how it feels to be confronted with an apparently impossible situation and say: "Yes, I am willing." Yes, I will do that which seems unreasonable, difficult or even impossible, if my Master, the Eternal or the circumstances of my life require it. We need not to go searching for unreasonable, difficult or impossible situations to challenge us. "The koan appears naturally in daily life."² The most difficult situation we are faced with on a daily basis is to get the self out of the way. This is the same thing as letting go of the emotions that obscure the Truth. As Great Master Dogen says it: "forget the selfish self for a while and allow the mind to be natural for this is very close to the Mind that seeks the Way."³

What happens if the external conditions are not as perfect as we would like them to be? What if they are just fine and we still feel something is missing? What happens if someone disappoints us, makes us feel victimized, or otherwise causes us to experience suffering? How can we empower ourselves to change our attitude? We can put meditation into practice, accepting responsibility for the feelings. They must be accepted. A very positive action, acceptance is symbolized by the raising of the energy of the breath up the spine as one inhales, and over the head and down the front as one exhales, actualizing the internal spiritual cleansing fountain. This is the mental gesture of embracing and accepting the suffering. We must not attempt to repress, deny or push away the suffering or the emotions, nor must we act on them or indulge them. First we must accept fully that they do exist. We do not have to eliminate them, but we need to learn to experience threatening emotions without acting on them and without pushing them away, just as we treat thoughts in meditation.

Then we need to learn to offer them up or let them go. This is the mental gesture of opening the heart. The source of suffering is attachment to desire. It is clinging to the emotions, just as the body reacts to threatening situations with tension, so the karmically conditioned mind clings to emotions. These emotions, no matter how painful, are, at least, familiar. They are a confirmation of the existence of a self, and have become a source of entertainment. We fear the unknown and, therefore, are reluctant to part with these familiar angers and fears. We can help physically by opening the hands with the palms up. We normally do this at the end of meditation as a gesture of offering. We can do this as well when confronted with a strong emotion in our daily life activity. First stop and hold the hands with the palms

together in a gesture of reverence, let the energy rise up the spine as you inhale and down the front as you exhale, symbolically embracing the suffering and treating it respectfully. Then hold your hands out with the palms up and offer the feelings up as a gift to the Eternal.

We may ask: "How can I do this when everything in me wants to strike out in anger or run away in fear?" We need to learn to "grasp the will." The Bodhisattva Achalanatha is one of the guardians of the Temple in our Order. He is the great immovable one, who represents vigilance, the will, purity and emptiness. He stands rooted on a rock (that which is immovable) in a halo of flames (the fires of greed, anger and fear) holding the sword of wisdom in one hand to cut through confusion and a rope in the other to bind all evil. He has a look of intense concentration on his face, which symbolizes the grasping of the will and the determination to use our vigilance to eliminate the impurities we have inherited from our past existence in order to fully experience the Truth.

Both the gentleness of the compassionate Avalokiteshwara and the intense determination of Achalanatha are simply two aspects of the same thing--the ability to eliminate the veils of obscuration that reinforce the illusion that we are separate or apart from the Buddha Nature--The Unborn, our spiritual essence. Removing the layers of the onion, or the veils of illusion, is a gradual process and may take many years of practice both before and after a genuine understanding or religious experience. Some people believe that the experience itself is the purpose of religious practice. However, Great Master Dogen emphasizes the unity of training and enlightenment. Everyday, for 45 years after his enlightenment, the Buddha put on his kesa and carried his begging bowl. He reaffirmed his commitment to the Precepts

and the process of training. Everyday he did what needed to be done to further his spiritual purpose.

When our understanding is real, we see just how much more there is to do. As long as we have a bodily existence, we will have old karma to deal with, and difficulties will arise naturally in daily life; all of us will have to face, illness, old age, and death. If we exercise the ability to change our attitude, then these difficulties become the vehicles that lead us to the Truth. There is nothing that is separate or apart from the Unborn. We cannot understand or appreciate this until we exercise the freedom of choice to let go of viewing everything through the distortions of the emotions. My late master would find annoying things presented to her from time, and she did not pretend that she was less than human. When something bothered her she would say so. Then she would say: "End of grouch!" She would simply let go of the anger and manifest an entirely different attitude. She might write down her reactions in a letter, which might make her feel better. Then she might not send the letter, if it were not in harmony with the Precepts or were not the most skillful way to solve the problem. We must give these strong emotions some space before we take action. The self is very subtle, and we must guard against the less obvious forms of emotionalism.

Most of the time anger or feelings of being victimized arise because we have not asserted ourselves or taken the necessary action to deal responsibly with the situation.

Dogen points out that to study Buddhism is to study the self, and to study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be enlightened by all things. Perhaps the most important part of cleaning up old emotional habits is the ability to "forget the self." The self is like the little kid who is leaping up and down trying to get the adults to notice that

he wants something and cannot wait a second longer. What happens if we exercise patience when we feel that way? What happens if we just relax in the midst of the tension and let go of the emotional "demand?" Conversely, the self avoids things that appear difficult or unpleasant. To forget the self here requires a willingness to act.

First we have to know that we can, in fact, change. One of the most helpful ways I have seen to do this is the paramita (wisdom) of sympathy. When dealing with others, we can put ourselves in the position of the other person. If we are willing to feel the grief, anger, fear, or suffering of another, we soon realize that our own difficulties are usually unimportant in contrast. Even when our difficulties may be great, the other person may not be able to see this. In being respectful of another, we touch the true nature of the Unborn, an important aspect of cleaning the old karma and converting the emotional obstacles into opportunities.

Emotional reactions are likely to be strongest when we feel tired, weak, ill, or vulnerable in some way. One of the most important things to keep in mind under these circumstances is that we still have choices. We can make decisions that will allow our situation to improve. We may not be able to stop the pain; the fire may still burn; the flood may still carry away our possessions; illness injury and death may still be present, but "in darkness there is light, and in light there is darkness." Opening the heart, exploring the pain, or relaxing into the tension: these are ways of affecting a change of attitude that will allow us to find the light in the darkness and further peel away the layers of the emotional onion.

Another facet of the cleaning process is humility. There is an enormous relief when one can, even momentarily, let go of the idea of being God. We can stop complaining that the Eternal is not ordering the universe to suit our every wish. In

letting go of seeing a situation as "injustice" or feeling helpless, we put ourselves in the posture of being able to learn something about ourselves. We may not have access to the knowledge of all the past life karma that has led to the present moment. We may only see the apparent injustice of the current situation: a murder, an accidental death, an injury, an illness, a war, cruelty to a child or an animal. We do not know the spiritual cause of these consequences and may feel angry or hurt. Humility is found in the willingness to accept that we cannot change the very fundamental fact of the existence of suffering. It is wise and skillful thinking to realize that whatever suffering we or anyone else is now experiencing is due to unenlightened actions in the past. At the same time we can work for the good of all living things through the cleaning up of the karmic inheritance we personally have received, with the use of the Precepts and the wisdoms of charity, sympathy, tenderness and benevolence.

Humor is an important part of humility. The real joke is that we take ourselves seriously. The emotional anxieties and tension created by over-reacting to habitual patterns are the means the emotions use in creating confusion. The confusion itself fosters the illusion that if I am confused, I am not responsible for any harm that may befall as a result. This is another aspect of the joke that the self plays on us. Acceptance and humility do not require one to be passive. My late master used to say: "If you are going to err, err on the side of activity." If you see something that needs to be said or done to stop harm or help either yourself or another, then say or do it. If in acting, you notice that you are acting from a place of unconverted emotion and not from stillness, then bring the mind back to its True Home.

Our True Wish is to know the Eternal. With the eradication

of the two obscurations, thus fulfilling the purpose of having gained a human form, unsurpassable full awakening will be achieved.

¹ From The Jeweled Rosary of an Awakening Warrior, by Atisa, with commentary based on an oral transmission by Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey from the book: Advice from a Spiritual Friend, by Geshe Dhargyey, translated and edited by Brian Beresford with Gonsar Tulku and Sharpa Tulku, (Boston, Mass.: Wisdom Publications, 1996), pp.44-45. ² Rules for Meditation in The Liturgy of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives for the Laity (Mt. Shasta, CA: Shasta Abbey Press, 1987), p 99. ³ Great Master Dogen Zenji, from Zen is Eternal Life as translated by Roshi P.T.N.H.Jiyu Kennett (Mt. Shasta, CA: Shasta Abbey Press, 1987), p.126.

Priory News Priory's Wesak Celebration Wesak commemorates the birth of Shakyumuni Buddha. This is the most important day of the Buddhist year and Buddhists everywhere express their gratitude for the existence of the Three Treasures. The dates for Wesak differ throughout the Buddhist world and the Priory celebrated its Wesak on Sunday, May 11. We set up a beautiful outside altar in front of the Priory's garage. A trellis of silk flowers was arranged around an almost life sized Buddha statue that was generously loaned to the Priory for the ceremony. All the altar surfaces were covered in gold-colored silk. At the Wesak ceremony, instead of offering incense at the altar, everyone poured sweet tea over the head of the statue of a baby Buddha. This symbolizes the waters of compassion abundantly pouring over the Buddha and flowing over everything in the whole universe. We sang many of the special hymns written for Wesak and the ceremony had a joyous feeling. Another special element of this Wesak was

the excellent sound system which a Sangha member loaned us for the ceremony. We played a tape of the Wesak hymns and the Priory's Sangha singing merged with the taped singing and it was wonderful. After the ceremony, the children had a Dharma class which included a treasure hunt throughout the Priory garden. Rev. Kinrei gave a Dharma class on how running away from suffering prevents us from being present, and finding joy and peace. It was followed by an extremely diverse and bountiful potluck lunch. Potlucks at the Priory are good occasions to get to know our fellow Sangha members and they help us to build a strong sense of belonging to a community of Buddhists.

The Priory Dragon Gate

Two dragons had been carved out of stone for the Priory in Bali and shipped here. We carefully painted the dragons, a fairly lengthy process in which the intricate details were painted by many different Sangha members. The dragons are fragile and they each weigh about 150 pounds, so the raising them to the beam across the gate was a difficult process. We managed to get the dragons in place during the Priory work day on May 24.

Dogen, in the Shobogenzo-zuimonki, teaches, "In the ocean there is a place called the Dragon Gate, where vast waves rise incessantly. Without fail all fish who pass through this place become dragons." Our wish is that all who enter the Priory through the Dragon Gate realize that they are not just ordinary humans; they are Buddhas.

Taking the Precepts Four members of the Priory Sangha, Amanda Snedaker, Meridith Breeden, Rob Rayle and Chad Barker, took the Buddhist Precepts and became lay Buddhists at this March's Keeping of the Ten Precepts Retreat at Shasta Abbey. A deep commitment to follow the Buddha is the lifeblood of the Sangha and we rejoice and are grateful for all who have vowed to seek the Way and be part of the Buddhist Sangha. Now the universe rejoices, the earth trembles and the flowers fall. The Bodhisattvas of other worlds ask their Buddha what this means and the Buddha replies that a new disciple has been given the Pure Great Precepts of the Bodhisattvas and been converted to the Truth by the Master who was given the Precepts before in the teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha who is the Buddha of this world. The disciple will become a Buddha in the future through this merit, therefore the universe rejoices. From the Ceremony of Receiving the Precepts

New Lay Minister at Priory

Mischa Wendel became a lay minister at Shasta Abbey on May 23. Rev. Master Haryo Young, the acting Head of the Order presented Mischa with her lay minister's robe and small kesa. Becoming a lay minister is a recognition of commitment and steadfast training and the willingness to be of service to the Sangha. We wish Mischa our best in her ongoing efforts to walk in the footsteps of the Buddha.

Although there is limitless water gushing from the high rocks,
Washing out the stones and scattering the clouds,
Watering the snows and crushing the flowers,
Yet there is an immaculate kesa above the dirt.

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 the monks.

In recent months, we have been given many generous gifts that help support the temple. We were given a large amount of concrete, redwood lumber, a TV-VCR unit, TV antennae, paint, fax machine, paper goods, blank cassette tapes, plants, fertilizer, tools, office supplies, cleaning 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 from cows, so please try not to donate foods with cow dairy product in them. However, both Rev. Kinrei and Margaret can eat goat and sheep cheese and these are useful donations. 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.

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 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 painting the dragons, gardening, cleaning, computer work, bookkeeping, cooking, sewing, 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 and encouraged to come to the Priory whenever you can and offer your help. The next work day is scheduled for Saturday, **August 2**, from 9:30 am to 3:00 pm, 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.