

Everyday Life is the Way

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A spiritual practice is a personal thing and probably varies as much as there are individuals. Finding what is right or what works for oneself can be a challenge and a series of trials and errors. Fortunately for me Serene Reflection Meditation was the end of my search and offered instruction which took away the guesswork and clarified what training could look like.

I remember attending the Introductory Retreat at Shasta Abbey and the emotional experiences I went through that first weekend. I came to that weekend already considering myself a Buddhist, knowing some of the Buddhist teachings and having an inconsistent practice. I was surprised to find the retreat completely structured and the expectation was that everyone “do it their way,” the Shasta Way. First off that rubbed me the wrong way but then I asked myself, “Why Are You Here?” I finally relaxed my expectations, opened myself to the possibility of learning what I needed and getting what I came for. It was amazing when I let go and got myself out of the way things began to make sense and fall into place. I came away from the weekend with a desire and an understanding of how to get serious about my Buddhist training.

A concern of mine was how to be a Buddhist without alienating friends, family, coworkers, etc. It probably helped that many people already considered me a little eccentric. Of course, I’ve come to the realization that it doesn’t really matter what others think and in following the middle way there are ways to do training that are considerate of others. I decided that I was in this tradition for the long haul and needed to develop a training foundation that would keep me moving along the Path.

First of all I began consistent sitting meditation practice and established regular meditation times. For me the regularity of it seems to be more important than the length of time. I have a place with a small altar that helps me settle my mind and is away from household activities. Occasionally my partner comments, “Isn’t it time for your meditation?” or “I don’t know what you’re doing but don’t stop.”

The consistent meditation has been the main thing that has opened me to understanding more about training. I am now aware that meditation is a 24 hour process and not something which happens just when I am in formal sitting meditation. This was something which I had read about but now have experienced for myself. Being aged sixty, I plan to spend the rest of my years deepening my training.

I find that saying mantras are effective in stilling my monkey mind. I frequently use a mala (Buddhist rosary) as this helps keep me focused. My favorite mantras are “I take refuge in the Buddha, I take refuge in the Dharma, I take refuge in the Sangha” and “Gyatei, gyatei, hara gyatei, hara so gyatei, Bodhi, sowaka!”¹

Manjusri Bodhisattva, who represents Great Wisdom, seems to speak to me. It is one of those things I don’t understand but reflect upon fairly frequently. I have been given several things representing Manjusri Bodhisattva and he is visible in my house as I go about my day. Of my own choosing I’d probably gravitate more towards Avalokitesvara and Samantabhadra but Manjusri has lessons for me. In *Zen Is Eternal Life* the chapter “The Heart of Manjusri” says, “...compassion and love dissolve into wisdom, which is the immaculacy of nothingness, leading to being able to just live, expecting nothing, seeking nothing and knowing nothing—....”²

The Dharma tapes from Shasta Abbey are a wonderful teaching tool for me. I signed up for the tapes months before I made it to the Introductory Retreat and they continue to be a monthly highlight. I have

kept all the tapes and keep relistening to them. When I am on a long drive I take tapes with me and listen to Rev. Master Eko's teachings. It is amazing how much more I learn and understand each time I hear a tape over again.

Where would my training be without Rev. Oswin and the Eugene Priory? Sangha is such an important part of Buddhist training. The Priory has accepted me so graciously even though I am 150 miles away and appear on their doorstep irregularly and unannounced. E-mails from the temple and the Priory newsletter also help keep me informed about sangha activities. I am most grateful for their generosity and example.

Buddhist practice makes me realize that the more I know the less I know and it really doesn't matter because training is living and living is training.

¹ Rev. Master Eko Little, "The Ten Precepts Meeting: The Ceremony of Daily Life," *Serene Reflection Meditation*, 6th Edition (Mt. Shasta, CA: Shasta Abbey Press, 1996), p. 97. [This mantra is the last line of *The Scripture of Great Wisdom*. Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett translates it in our liturgy as "Going, going, going on beyond And always going on beyond,— always BECOMING Buddha. Hail! Hail! Hail!" See page 35 of *The Monastic Office* (Mt. Shasta, CA: Shasta Abbey Press, 1993. -ed.)]

² Roshi P.T.N.H. Jiyu-Kennett, *Zen Is Eternal Life*, Chapter 7 "The Heart Of Manjusri," 4th Edition (Mt. Shasta, CA: Shasta Abbey Press, 1999), pp. 54-55.

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