

**January 2017**

Greetings!

I hope everyone had a nice New Year. Seattle Dharma Refuge is a member temple of an organization of small temples that was formed a couple of years ago, the Serene Reflection Dharma Association ([www.serenerellectiondharma.org](http://www.serenerellectiondharma.org)). The purpose of the Association is to preserve and foster the teachings and practice of the Serene Reflection Meditation tradition of Buddhism as transmitted by Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett.

The Association is starting a monthly newsletter in January. The teachings in the Association newsletter will be by monks I have known and trained with for many years. I also plan to contribute to it myself. I am sure these teachings will be very helpful to all.

This e-mail contains several of the articles from the first issue. The complete issue, with news of the member temples and an additional article, can be viewed at: [http://serenerellectiondharma.org/newsletter/1-17/news\\_1-17.htm](http://serenerellectiondharma.org/newsletter/1-17/news_1-17.htm)

If anyone would like to subscribe to receive an e-mail link to subsequent issues of the Association newsletter, they can sign up at <mailto:newsletter.srda@gmail.com>.

Take care,

With all my heart,  
Rev. Basil

## **From the Dean Rev. Master Mokushin Hart**

We are pleased to welcome you to the first issue of the Serene Reflection Dharma Association Newsletter. We invite you to subscribe to our e-mail list so that you will be notified as each issue becomes available. You may subscribe by sending a request to [newsletter.srda@gmail.com](mailto:newsletter.srda@gmail.com). The e-mail notice will include a link to the latest issue on our website. If you prefer, you may also find the newsletters by going directly to our website at [www.serenerellectiondharma.org](http://www.serenerellectiondharma.org) and clicking on the newsletter link.

We wish you the best for the coming year.



# **The Universality of Gratitude**

**Rev. Master Mokushin Hart**

North Cascades Buddhist Priory

About 6 years ago, I found an orphaned baby mouse lying in the driveway of the temple. I took him in and managed to nurse him along until he was eating solid food. After a few weeks, I had to meditate with the question of whether to release him back into the wild or keep him for the duration of his life. This decision would have a big impact on him, and I took it very seriously. In this particular case, it came up quite clearly to keep him in captivity and so I did. I did some research on what his habits would be in the wild, and did my best to try to give him some semblance of a normal life. So each night, as he was waking up and before I went to sleep, he would come out into my easily cleanable room for hunting and hiding the food I would scatter for him, exploring, and interacting with me.



Exploring was a very important occupation, and Charlie, as I called him, would go everywhere I had not put up a mouse-proof barrier. I had an electric plug-in radiator which I would unplug before he came out of his house, draping the cord over the top. One evening, he climbed up the electric cord to the top of the radiator and then could not get down again. He tried jumping from fin to fin, and then looked all around for somewhere else to jump. I watched him as he realized he was

not going to be able to get out of this situation. Then he looked up at me with an “eek!” look on his face. I said, “Are you stuck, Charlie?” which of course he did not understand; nevertheless, there was a communication there. He gave me another “eek!” look in response, so I put out my hand. He jumped onto my hand and I swung my arm over a short distance to where he could hop off and continue his explorations. He jumped off my hand and started to run along. Then suddenly he stopped, turned around, ran all the way up my arm to my shoulder and touched his nose to my cheek. Then he ran back down my arm and went on his way.

Great Master Dogen says:

*“Because of consideration for others on the part of the Buddhas and Ancestors, we are enabled to see the Buddha even now and hear His teachings: had the Buddhas and Ancestors not truly Transmitted the Truth it could never have been heard at this particular time: even only so much as a short phrase or section of the teaching should be deeply appreciated. What alternative have we but to be utterly grateful for the great compassion exhibited in this highest of all teachings which is the very eye and treasury of the Truth? The sick sparrow never forgot the kindness shown to it and rewarded it with the ring belonging to the three great ministers, and the unfortunate tortoise remembered too, showing its gratitude with the seal of Yofu: if even animals can show gratitude surely man can do the same?”<sup>1</sup>*

I read this passage for many years and, being unfamiliar with the references, did not quite take literally the stories of the gratitude expressed by these creatures. Although I have had

other experiences of the gratitude of animals, as many of us have, this experience with Charlie was so unexpected and sweet that it brought the point home in a wonderful way.

For most if not all of us it is not too difficult to find gratitude for the things in life we find pleasant, helpful or joyous. As we meditate and train in the practice of the Precepts over time, we gradually come to see that the difficulties as well as the pleasant experiences in our lives are all a part of the unfolding of the Truth for us. This is hard to grasp with the intellect: we can find the difficult times quite hard to bear. And regardless of our efforts to organize our lives to minimize the difficulties, they always recur in some form that we cannot avoid. How is it possible to find gratitude in our hearts for these difficult times?

Keeping up a regular meditation schedule provides the foundation and momentum for our practice. At the same time, the practice of meditation must be accompanied by the deep study and implementation of the Buddhist Precepts. Without this combination of meditation and Precepts it is extremely difficult to make the leaps that help us break out of our limited understanding of the True Nature of things. When we base our actions of body, speech and mind on that limited view, we only compound our confusion. It is indeed our limited understanding, rather than the True Nature of reality, that inhibits the natural uprising of gratitude in our hearts and minds.

How is it that the Precepts help us in this? I have found for myself that it is the effort to hold to as deep an understanding of the Precepts as I can, whenever I have to make a decision about a difficulty I am facing in daily life, which has gradually been working a transformation in my point of view. Even when I am seriously tempted to consciously make a habitual, yet not quite Preceptual, choice something in me quietly asks, “Yes, but

is this the person I TRULY want to be?” And something in me responds, sometimes with some reluctance, “Actually, I would find myself harder to live with if I choose my habitual point of view.” However hard it may seem at times to choose to take the deeper view of things, this choosing is the means by which our understanding is transformed and we learn again to live fully from our True Heart, the Buddha Nature.

Reading the Kyojukaimon<sup>2</sup> with commentary by Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett regularly is a wonderful way to help us in this process. It is written from a place of deep meditation and understanding. It provides invaluable guidance when we find ourselves stuck or confused about any situation in which we may find ourselves. This teaching is a great vehicle which will help carry us along not only in the beginning, but throughout the “journey” of our Buddhist practice.

*From these Precepts come forth such a wind and fire that all are driven into enlightenment when the flames are fanned by the Buddha’s influence: this is the merit of non-action and non-seeking; the awakening to True Wisdom.<sup>3</sup>*

We are indeed so fortunate to have the opportunity to encounter these teachings!

1. Shushogi, pp. 101-103 in *Zen is Eternal Life* by Reverend P.T.N.H. Jiyu-Kennett, M.O.B.C., Fourth Edition, 1999. Shasta Abbey Press, Mount Shasta CA. (Available for downloading at: <http://www.shastaabbey.org/pdf/bookZel.pdf>.)
2. Kyojukaimon and Commentary, available at: <http://northcascadesbuddhistpriory.org/Precepts/Kyojukaimon.pdf>.

3. Shushogi, ibid, pp. 98-99.



**Transfer of Merit**  
**Rev. Master Bennet Laraway**  
North Star Dharma Refuge

Zen temples have space dedicated to displaying “Transfer of Merit” notices. As on the “prayer boards” in some western churches, people are invited to list beings—human or animal—who are or will be suffering or in distress or danger in some form. Situations in which masses of people are suffering, such as natural or man-made disasters, are also included. Examples might be:

FOR Alice Jones, who is having bypass surgery on 12/1. Requested by her daughter, Jane.

FOR victims of the tsunami in Japan. 12/1

FOR Patches the dog, who died on 11/31, aged 16 years, and for Jim and Mary Smith, grieving his loss. 12/1

Transfer of Merit notices make all temple trainees aware of these needs, inviting them to dedicate the merit of their meditation and training to helping these needs. How is this help possible?

Zen has an often-quoted aphorism that “all is one, and all is different.” An image that I find helpful for contemplating this principle is this:



From *Minnesota State of Wonders, a Photographic Exploration*, by Brian Peterson

Notice that although each dewdrop is unique, each one has the qualities and characteristics of a dewdrop and is distinguishable as such. Moreover, they are interconnected and form one overall “web” of individual droplets. Also, each droplet reflects each other and the surroundings. And for the purposes of metaphor, the “web” is not limited in time or space.

Hopefully not pushing this visual metaphor too far, I think of each droplet as representing a transitory and ephemeral being reflecting the Eternal Buddha Nature. If we imagine a particular droplet succumbing to the law of gravity and falling from the web, its loss will naturally affect the other droplets closest to it (although that which is reflected remains unaffected). However far away one droplet might be from another, though, its change

or loss will affect all others, however subtly. Thus, what happens to an individual droplet is transferred to all the others.

When we train in meditation and the Precepts the egocentric self lessens in intensity, allowing selfless compassion to arise naturally. We don't create this compassion, because it is always there and is the actual fundamental nature of our being. However, we block its natural arising and flow by habits of body, speech and mind based on selfish greed, anger and ignorance/delusion. Our meditation and Preceptual training tempers these negative actions and enables what might be thought of as the "positive energy" of this compassion to manifest. In this way, just by doing our training we are benefitting all beings (including ourselves).

In a particular sense, it is natural that the needs of beings closer to us are more "on our radar." In these cases, the merit of our training can be offered—transferred—directly to specific individuals in need. In practical terms, this offering can be done in various ways, depending on the individual. What I tend to do is, as I settle down to meditate I call the being or situation to mind and heart and silently offer the merit of my meditation to the needs of that being or situation. Then I release them from my mind (although not my heart) and into the compassionate hands of the Eternal and just meditate without dwelling on them or their situation.

The Buddha said that the workings of karma are so intricate that only a Buddha can comprehend it. Consequently, a vitally important aspect of transferring merit is not asking or wishing for a particular outcome to a particular situation, such as "asking" for someone to completely recover from Stage 4 cancer. It is enough for us to simply offer the merit and trust that the compassion of the Eternal will make the best use of it for the being in question.



Offering merit to a being in need who is particularly close to us can help enormously in moderating our own grief and pain. In making the offering we know that our training actually helps that being and that we are not simply a helpless, passive observer. To actually be able to do our training and offer merit is therefore also a blessing to ourselves. One of the many blessings for self and other that naturally arise from the sincere practice of our Buddhist meditation and Preceptual training.