

A photograph of a person sitting in a meditative pose, with their hands resting on their knees in a mudra. The person is wearing a white t-shirt and dark red pants. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with a blue sky and greenery.

LONG BEACH MEDITATION

APRIL - JUNE 2022

ISSUE 1

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Letter from our Guiding Teacher

Dear Friends,

It is my honor and privilege to contribute to Long Beach Meditation's first newsletter. Our Sangha has been on quite a journey over these past several years. What a wonderfully committed community of meditation practitioners we are! I sincerely thank you for staying the course. Throughout the pandemic, the members of Long Beach Meditation (LBM) have functioned as the living heart of the organization. I would like to express my genuine appreciation to each of you for your ongoing contributions and care. I trust that this new form of communication will enrich our connection to one another and expand our capacity to inquire, share, and reflect as a community.

Over the last few years many of us overcame our initial reluctance to participate in online practice, finding solid support in our virtual gatherings. Now, at last, we have returned to in-person meetings each Sunday and will be expanding our in-person offerings as we go forward. We are presently developing upcoming retreats, multi-week class series, and day-long practice sessions. Each offering is a unique reflection of the unity and diversity which characterize so truly our community's expression and collective gifts. LBM is blessed with teachers and practitioners representing many different lineages. At the root, we all practice the profound and timeless teachings of the Buddha's path of awakening.

The philosopher Heraclitus said, "You cannot step into the same river twice." On the level of form, this mysterious world we live in is always changing. There are new and difficult challenges emerging. Our community has been a steady fixture in Long Beach for many years now. Hundreds, perhaps thousands of hands and eyes have helped keep this dharma expression alive. The cast of characters is ever-changing, but our collective practice continues without end.

The life-changing practice of present awareness and meditation is invaluable, transformational, and essential. There is a koan in the Zen Buddhist tradition which points to the true nature of compassionate action:

Ungan asked Dogo, "How does the Bodhisattva Kanzeon (Avalokiteśvara) use all those many hands and eyes?" Dogo answered, "It is like a person in the middle of the night reaching behind their head for a pillow." Ungan said, "I understand." Dogo said, "How do you understand it?" Ungan said, "All over the body are hands and eyes." Dogo said, "That is very well expressed, but it is only eighty percent of the answer." Ungan said, "How would you say it, Elder Brother?" Dogo said, "Throughout the body, are hands and eyes."

Ours are the hands and eyes of awakening, of enlightenment, of compassionate action. Each of us is called to find our home within this truth. Our practice continues. Refinement is endless. Intimacy with all things is the standard. Dharma practice is inclusive of everyone and everything, without exception. As Zen Master Dogen said, "The boundaries of realization are not distinct."

I look forward to where the path will lead this spring and beyond. LBM has so many unique and interesting voices. Please let us know how you would like to see our Sangha grow, and what you would like to study and explore. Your perspective is valued. I look forward to seeing you soon.

Bows,

Jokai

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Letter from the Board Chair

On behalf of the Long Beach Meditation Board of Directors, I want to thank all our sustaining members for their support, particularly over the past couple years. Your support, including financial, but also your presence at sits and retreats and your willingness to volunteer where needed has been critical to the success of LBM.

I understand that many members have faced personal and professional difficulties over the last few years and yet you continue to support LBM to achieve its mission of offering a welcoming space for all to learn the healing arts of meditation and mindfulness.

I want to introduce you to our fantastic group of seven other volunteer Board members, an unpaid position, including Jenene Koehler, Stefanie Fredella, Reed Watson, Alma Castro, Marie Beccue, Wendy Danbury, and Jokai Blackwell. These people work hard behind the scenes to manage the many administrative tasks for LBM to operate smoothly. Let us not forget our long-time operations manager Travis Ott-Conn, who has been supporting LBM for over nine years!

Some of you may have noticed that the LBM website no longer refers to Jokai Blackwell as Sensei. I am happy to inform you that on February 6, 2022, after two decades of study, Jokai was elevated to the position of Roshi by his teacher. This is a significant achievement and honor for a Zen teacher. I am so pleased to have Jokai Blackwell Roshi as our guiding teacher to lead us through these difficult times.

Recently on March 4th, Jokai and the Teachers' Council met to discuss upcoming LBM program offerings. LBM will be offering a variety of in-person events including half and all-day retreats in Long Beach and a weekend retreat at Yokoji Zen Mountain Center next month.

We will also be continuing our virtual events and online access to hybrid in-person events via Zoom. Please check our website regularly for more details.

Please know that the LBM Board takes its financial oversight duties very seriously. The financial health and stability of the organization is a major discussion item at each Board meeting, in order to use your donations as effectively and efficiently as possible. More information describing how careful the Board is with your donations will be provided in a future newsletter.

Lastly, I want to welcome you all to offer your insights to furthering the mission of LBM by contacting Travis at info@longbeachmeditation.org with feedback at any time, or if you are interested in volunteering opportunities or joining the Board. Thank you again for all your support and I look forward to seeing you on the cushion.

Sincerely yours,

Brandon Salcido

Board Chair



SUSTAINING MEMBERS

Outrageous gratitude to our generous sustaining members, who keep Long Beach Meditation afloat through thick and thin. We just wouldn't be without you.

This quarterly newsletter is our offering in parallel, with news, events, and feature articles written by our teachers and fellow sangha members. We hope it will cast a glimmer of light and joy into your daily routine. May we all meet again soon on the cushion!



Reflection: Surprises at Yokoji

After beginning to sit with LBM in the autumn of 2019, I decided to resist the habitual temptation to intellectualize: I put aside any reading of scholarly literature about Buddhism; I would just show up for practice and see what happens. Two years later, I visited Yokoji-Zen Mountain Center in the wilderness near Idyllwild to participate for the first time in an in-person, multi-day meditation retreat. The surprises began even before I reached the retreat hall.

Highway construction led me to abandon the planned route. The manager of a lonely mini mart somewhere on the dusty outskirts of San Jacinto gave me just the right directions to set me back on track. Upon arrival at Yokoji, I wandered over to the dining hall where sangha members were beginning to congregate. I was greeted with a warm hug by someone hitherto encountered through the digital meditation hall, a surprising welcome into the community of practitioners. Then came the silence of sitting practice, overflowing with the rush of wind through the trees and the rambunctious raccoons playing on the roof of the zendo. Emerging from that silence into the first evening, I smiled at the brightness of the stars, the dazzling cleft of the Milky Way.

Perhaps the greatest surprise was the gentle flow of the weekend, no need to force anything. When conversation re-appeared after our last sitting session on Sunday, we all knew what to do. Even so, I felt a subtle shift, as though we were all a bit more at ease and, at the same time, a bit more vulnerable.

Much that I have reflected upon since beginning meditation practice with LBM two years ago appeared in greater relief after the Yokoji retreat. I didn't come to this austere practice with any thought of how much I might glean from what my fellow meditation students say about their struggles, what has brought them here, how they persevere in the practice.



While expressed in uniquely personal terms, what I hear often relates the surprise at finding such vitality in a practice that at first glance appeared too simple and abstract, the unexpected discovery of wisdom in basic ideas about the heart-mind that seemed dry and academic.

After our final sitting session at Yokoji, everyone had a chance to speak. I shared briefly about the busy efforts of a lifetime to manage how others would see me, and how little space this leaves to really experience life as it is presently lived. At Yokoji I was able to breathe into the unity of personal struggles and the collective wish for a flourishing life. In that unity, as my precious self-image oh-so-slowly fades, I can just be as I am.

Wandering the quiet mountain trail on Sunday, before beginning the journey home, I picked up a glistening piece of pale quartz. While the little rock was mostly cloudy, the sun illuminated a crystal inclusion, an image of clarity amidst turmoil, as I continue to sit and breathe, opening to a life full of surprises.

Contributed by
Robert (Ari) Grossman



JOIN US THIS APRIL

2022 Spring Retreat @YOKOJI

Led by Jokai Blackwell Roshi
Friday, April 22 -
Sunday, April 24, 2022

The unique setting and purpose-built grounds will ensure that participants can sink deep into the silence of the mountains, enjoying the peace and tranquility that this valley offers.



Mettā in Daily Life

Not unlike the proverbial act of revenge, the practice of mettā is a dish best served cold.

Does that surprise you a little?

It is the act of turning to mettā as an acceptable substitute when a grasping to cause harm arises within us that allows us to bring our light into the world.

In January 2020, I traveled to a monastery in the north of Myanmar for a monthlong Mettā Retreat. I also took temporary ordination, garbing myself in a collection of oddly tailored pink and orange bedsheets. As I sat with soapy head bowed to be shorn by a smiling elderly nun wielding a 1950s-style double-edged blade, my American teacher-nun sang, “Hair of the head, hair of the body....” This is a traditional Theravadin contemplation, as were the trickles of blood from the very few nicks at the skilled barber’s hand. I quickly learned how to shave my own head every other day.

About two weeks later, having mostly recovered from a probable bout of COVID-19 in my kuti, I would find myself sitting in the meditation hall suddenly enjoying an odd and sourceless spring breeze upon my bare head. Until I realized there was no breeze anywhere else. The Sayadaw, or Abbot of the monastery, referred in one talk to this common effect of intensive mettā as “mettā A/C” or air-conditioning.

“Even as a mother defends with her life, Her child, her only child.”

Mettā is a form of love, but not love as we tend to conceive of it secularly: passionate, warm and fierce. On first reading, the memorable line above from the Karanīya Mettā Sutta might seem to contradict this. Yet its true intent emerges in the couplet which follows on its heels: “So with a boundless heart, Should one cherish all living beings.” All living beings.

The object of mettā is all of us and everything, kindness and friendliness radiating outward, flowing freely and without distinction. Amid the unending inevitabilities of sickness, old age and death, we start to wish to protect all life equally, in particular life that is helpless to protect itself.

“This is what should be done, By one who is skilled in goodness.”

So what does it mean, to practice mettā in daily life?

As LBM teacher Tim Colohan once said, “The rain falling on the garden waters the weeds equally with the flowers.” The regular practice of mettā reveals first and foremost everything that is not mettā.

Practicing mettā might mean, as we cruise down the highway and yet another someone abruptly cuts across our lane inches from our fender, in the moment just after we raise a finger at them, we remember: “This is a person, like myself, who only wants to be happy and at peace.” In the grocery store line that hasn’t moved for those past ten minutes that feel like a thousand years, we heave a sigh and let go, sinking into mettā. As we walk down the street and look up at the sound of birdsong, notice the scent of jasmine in bloom or the velvet texture of a fallen rose petal, we remember and feel mettā for all living things. Seconds of mettā. Mere moments of mettā. Five minutes of uninterrupted mettā.

Slowly, slowly, things change. We notice slightly more. We separate and judge slightly less.

As with all forms of practice, we fail and start again. Fail, and start again. Gradually, we may develop a little more patience with ourselves and the world. And we remember to remember how often we forget ourselves.

Contributed by
Deborah (Marie) Beccue

INTERVIEW WITH FRANZ MANFREDI

What brings you to share your time & the teachings of the Buddha at LBM?

I can't imagine not sharing these teachings that have so revolutionized my life. My life has forever changed for the better. Originally I was just looking for a place to sit and a Sangha with which to practice. I had parted ways with my previous religious tradition and community. I found myself profoundly drawn to the teachings of the Buddha, primarily in the Pali Suttas but also the whole 2600-year stream of teachers and teachings coming from him. I went to Long Beach Meditation after checking out a few local Buddhist groups. They were all nice, but LBM seemed like a special place with a diverse body of teachers. After sitting with several of them, I requested an interview with Victor Byrd, the founder and guiding teacher at the time. We had a lovely conversation at his apartment and at the end of it he said, "Well, we are looking to have an ongoing beginner's class and you are obviously qualified to teach it." That was about 6 years ago (I think).

What is the most notable change the practice has brought to your own life?

After leaving my previous religious tradition, I found myself adrift. I knew that meditation was powerful, but my previous meditation practice was inextricably informed by my former path. I googled "Buddhist breath meditation." The first article I found was barely a snippet, a very simple breath-noting practice from Thich Nhat Hanh. I sat down and tried it. I was blown away. I had never gotten that settled and deeply calmed in so short a time before. I started doing this and other mindfulness related practices I learned from various teachers, especially Gil Fronsdal from IMC, and it immediately yielded positive changes in every aspect of my life. I can't think of a single arena which hasn't been changed for the better by meditation.

What do you enjoy most about working with beginning/newer meditators?

Really, I don't believe that there are beginning, intermediate or advanced meditators. Every time we sit is the first time. But to answer the question, I have spent so many hours on and off the cushion working harder instead of smarter in my practice. Clenching my teeth when I could have been relaxing, forcing when I could have been letting

the process unfold naturally, getting frustrated when I could have been trusting my heart. I love facilitating newer meditators to touch into their fundamental goodness and help them understand they have everything they need to develop a deep, enriching practice to last their whole lives.

You also lead a monthly Full Moon Meditation ceremony...

In most traditional Buddhisms, *Uposatha* is a time when the entire Sangha draws together to practice and reaffirm their commitment to the path and practice. To renew one's faith, if you will. It also links our individual spiritual life to the life of the whole natural world around us, Earth, Sun, Moon, and Stars, of which we are part and parcel.

One sentence or phrase that sums up the practice for you?

Perhaps this one: "Can you meet whatever is arising right now with kindness?" This one shift turns the whole world and her people and all things in it into our ally, our spiritual friend, our teacher, our Sangha.

Anything else on your heart-mind that you'd like to share?

I just want to say how truly grateful I am to be of service. Thank you to all the teachers, volunteers, and wonderful practitioners of Long Beach Meditation.

April - June 2022 Retreats

April 9 Evening half-day with Jokai Blackwell Roshi

Apr 22 - 24 Weekend Retreat at Yokoji-ZMC

May 14 Half-day online with Tim Colohan

May 28 In-person daylong with Jokai Blackwell

June 11
18 & 25 Three-part series with Jokai Blackwell



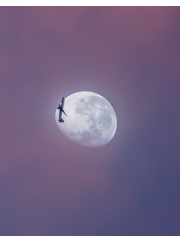
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**Sunday
Meditation**



**Monday
Meditation**



**Full Moon
Meditation**