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Adapting Western Chants and Hymn Tunes to Buddhist Texts

Unlocking Scriptures, Opening Hearts

REV. HELEN CUMMINGS

SHASTA ABBEY

What do Loreena McKennitt, Martin Luther, and St. Gregory the Great have in common? Their music is part of the liturgical treasury of Shasta Abbey, a Soto Zen monastic community in northern California founded in 1970. I suggest that it was inevitable that Buddhist scriptural texts would be combined with Western chants and hymn tunes; and in this article I would like to share how one Buddhist tradition has successfully blended Buddhist scriptural texts with Western chants and hymn tunes for daily use in the liturgies and ceremonies in our Western Soto Zen monastic community.

A key figure in this development was Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett,* born near Hastings in Sussex, England, on New Year's Day, 1924. Baptized into the Church of England as Peggy Teresa Nancy Kennett, she grew up in World War II London. At an early age she showed great musical ability; she earned a Bachelor of Music degree from Durham University (UK), with concentrations in early music (Western plainsong) and composition, and a Fellowship by Double Licentiate of Trinity College of Music (London). Building on these studies, she spent many years as an organist in the Anglican Church, and taught music in a Catholic boarding school at Westminster.

Early in life she had found in Buddhist teaching something meaningful that drew her into involvement with the London Buddhist Society. It was through this involvement that she met her teacher, the Venerable Keido Chisan Koho Zenji, Chief Abbot of Soji-ji, when he came to London as part of a world tour that included meeting with President Eisenhower in Washington. At his invitation she went to Japan in 1962 to become his disciple. The first woman to train at Soji-ji, one of the two major training monasteries of the Soto Zen tradition in Japan, Rev. Kennett came to the

** It is customary within the Buddhist traditions to take care that names, especially those of teachers and fellow monastics, are accompanied by appropriate honorifics. We have retained this practice of monastic courtesy and respect in the text, in the hope that it will carry with it a little of the atmosphere of the life of the Abbey. —Ed.*

United States in 1969, establishing Shasta Abbey in Northern California in 1970, and Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey in northern England in 1972. She founded the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives in 1978, and served as Head of the Order and Abbess of Shasta Abbey until her death in 1996.

Her musical compositions prior to becoming a monk included several motets and songs, a cantata, two operettas, and a string quartet; yet already in 1961, she won an international contest for a Buddhist Wesak celebratory anthem. Her entry, "Welcome, Joyous Wesak Day," with music written in a style that would allow it to be completely at home in an Anglican hymnal, is now sung throughout the Buddhist world.

After she became a monk Rev. Kennett's musical legacy may be described quite simply: she translated the key scriptures of the Soto Zen Buddhist tradition into accessible, metrical English, and set them to plainchant. At the time she did so, these were unusual practices. The general practice was to leave them untranslated or to set them to single-beat, monotone accompaniments as was done in Japan—or both.

When she was still Peggy Kennett, Rev. Kennett observed, "The composer really starts to compose when he throws away his textbooks and . . . creates something in which the form is almost accidental yet inseparable from and inevitable to the music, for form is the result of creation and not creation the result of form."¹ She set out to bring the heart of Zen teaching to the West. What she created is an altogether accessible Buddhist liturgy built on the rich treasury of chants and hymn tunes that are the religious music of the West. She set ten major Buddhist scriptures to Anglican chant, scriptures that our monastic community sings regularly—several of them at least once a day. Similarly, she set twelve major litanies to Anglican chant, as well as numerous offertories, mantras, dedications, and the "Homages" that, much like the familiar "Amen," close each of our recitations of scripture. She wrote or set to music sixty-two hymns that we sing throughout our liturgical year.² Building on the foundation she laid for us, we continue to create new Bud-



Rev. Jiyu-Kennett. Courtesy of Shasta Abbey

dhist hymns and chants, either setting scriptures and text to hymn tunes of the past and the present or creating our own music in the forms that are rooted in the very familiar religious music of the West.

Chanting in the Buddhist World

Buddhism originally developed within an oral culture, and as an oral tradition. Music in the Northern Indian culture where the Buddha lived in the fifth century BC was highly developed, both for secular ceremonial use and for religious purposes. Chant in particular was the means of memorizing a religious or historical text. Music and making music were an important part of the cultural milieu at all levels of society. The Buddha, in fact, made use of musical similes in his teaching. The Buddhist scriptures, held to be what the Buddha said in his almost fifty years of public teaching, developed as a vocalized reminder of the Buddha's words. In a world where the religious elite used exclusive language to preserve esoteric teaching, chanted words in the language of the marketplace and

the street made it possible for all to have access to and to remember these teachings.

Mantras, a particular kind of vocalized sound, also have a significant place in Buddhism. While the word has developed a much wider usage today, it originally meant *sacred sounds* that communicate through vibration to inspire and open the heart rather than the mind. Sacred sound, one definition of Buddhist "music," indeed seeks to open the heart and mind to that which is larger than the self, to harmonize body and mind, and in so doing, to create the mind of meditation. Rev. Kennett held that chanting is considered portable meditation.

It is no surprise, then, that chanting is an integral practice of all forms of Buddhism, in India and in the countries to which it spread, including Sri Lanka, China, Japan, Tibet, and Korea. But what has unfolded in the spread of Buddhism over the last 2,553 years is essentially the same "problem of translation and transmission from age to age and from land to land"³ that Christianity has faced. The varied forms of chanting in Buddhism are cultural rather than doctrinal. There is nothing inherent in the Buddha's legacy that requires a certain form of chanting or singing. Thus, there is a broad range of chanting styles evident in Buddhism today. Pali chanting has been described as speaking in a musical way. Chinese chanting is very percussive and regular. Sanskrit chanting is much less percussive and more melodic. Japanese chanting is a forceful monotone. One thing, however, common to all the varied forms is this: the religious music of the East often does not make sense to the ear of the Western religious person.

We at Shasta Abbey chant in English—and metrical English at that! We sing melodies rooted in a range of Western hymn books and traditions, many of them quite familiar to those of us coming to Buddhism from these traditions. The act of chanting scriptural texts itself is a "gospel ordinance" in all schools of Buddhism. In our own way, we are "people of the book"; whether chanting the name of Buddha, or repeating a particular mantra, or singing an extended scripture, monks and laity alike are invited to read, recite, write down, remember. This is done in order to *become* what is read, recited, written down, remembered. Thus the reciting, the chanting, the singing: all have a transformative purpose and, hopefully, effect. It expresses a living, faith-based, religious tradition. We are to bring to our daily life that which we chant at the start of the day:

In other words, Buddhist chanting serves as a reminder of the practice we need to follow in daily life. If we understand and learn how to do it properly, it is another type of meditation in itself. It is also at the same time a healing or blessing service. . . . When we chant if we try to concentrate well on the chanting, our mind becomes contemplative.⁴

And in chanting our faith grows. We can give some answer to the question Frank Burch Brown asked in a recent article in *THE HYMN*: “What if we really embraced the idea that song can provide a way of translating the meaning of faith into a medium that addresses body and mind and heart together?”⁵

This is what Buddhist chanting is all about.

Adapting Buddhist Scriptures to Western Chants: One Particular Case

How do you take a religion and its religious texts which have come to be deeply rooted in Asian cultures with picture-based languages and make it intelligible for Westerners in a way that is naturally “Western”?

This was the task that Rev. Kennett faced. It was the express wish of her teacher, Rev. Koho Zenji, that she *really translate* Buddhism to the West, not just import the cultural forms that had developed around the heart of the Soto Zen tradition in Japan since Eihei Dogen in the thirteenth century. Whether translating the basic teachings or the monastic forms, Rev. Kennett looked to bring the heart of the teaching or form, rather than the cultural overlay. This was true of chanting as much as anything else. She came to believe that this task would require either a totally new musical form, or it would involve the translation of that religious tradition through reinterpretation of the rich legacy of Western music in a direct and authentic form. She chose, almost inevitably, to do the latter, wedding Buddhist scriptures to the Western chants and hymn tunes she had played so often in her professional musical life. In bringing the practice of Serene Reflection Meditation to the West, she harmonized her own deep religious experience and all aspects of rich scriptural and ceremonial life from both Eastern and Western contexts.

In literally translating the scriptures, and in creating out of her life as a church musician the ceremonial forms for their use, she understood clearly the value of Western chants and hymn tunes as the religious music of the West, worthy vessels for the expression of faith. In doing this she did what longstanding Buddhist tradition urges: put the scriptures in a language that is accessible to all people, high or low. She was not rejecting Asian forms, though she was accused of “anglicanizing” Zen by some critics. Rev. Kennett always said she did not deliberately set out to *westernize*; she simply looked for the most skillful means of unfolding the Truth of Buddhism, unlocking the richness of the Buddhist scriptures, and opening Western hearts to the deep religious experience to which those scriptures point.

In translating the scriptural texts, Rev. Kennett would first make a basic rendering with her teachers, who were deeply versed in these texts from many years

of religious practice rather than academic study. She then eliminated any repetition, and created a chantable English text. She had an intuitive understanding of the nuances of meter and poetic rhythm; she was trained in plainsong and early music and understood the heart of the chant form.

What she did was deceptively simple; as a Westerner with full access to Western language, culture, and society, *and* with equal access to Japanese religious teachers who would help her to appreciate Soto Zen scriptures and traditions, she unfolded the heart of the Teaching, not the cultural overlays, into English. She was not the first to translate Buddhist scriptures into English or to set them to music; but she had training, intuition, and religious understandings that were unique. What she created is a model for Buddhist liturgical music in the West. She had the technical means, the musical and literary capacity, and the commitment to “keep true to the Source,” no matter the form.

Her legacy is a full schedule of daily monastic ceremonial: Morning Service and Morning Office, Mid-Day Service, and Vespers, as well as a full annual calendar of festival ceremonies, regular remembrances, and specific observances. Chants, hymns, invocations, and sung offertories are an essential part of all of them.

Austin Lovelace says that “the spirit of hymnody is found in movement—in development of Christian concepts. Its purpose is not the creation of an aura or mood of vague ‘spiritual emotion’ . . . but rather development of thought along scriptural and theological lines, using those poetic devices which will speed the process and make vivid the imagery.”⁶

I believe that Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett’s work is rooted in this same spirit. The spirit of “Buddhist Hymnody” as she has created it is rooted in the development of Buddhist teaching along scriptural lines, using those poetic devices that will speed the process of bringing the *Dharma*—the teachings of the Buddha—to life in those who sing or chant as part of their practice.

Shasta Abbey Chants: How We Use Western Chants and Hymn Tunes to Express Our Faith

So, what specifically did Rev. Master Jiyu do in adapting the Western chants and hymn tunes to the Buddhist texts that fill Shasta Abbey’s monastic days? And how are we continuing her work?

First, in keeping with our Preceptual practice, and following Rev. Kennett’s lead, we use some accepted conventions:

We honor all copyrights and legal acknowledgments.

We recognize the integrity of certain musical “vessels.”

We seek to express the Truth of our religion in ways that are embraceable by those in the West as we create our own tradition of religious expression.

Second, our scriptures are in English. Rev. Kennett worked with the senior monks at Soji-ji to translate the scriptures while she was in Japan, and continued when she came to America. When her eyesight and health failed—she had diabetes and suffered its complications—she entrusted the continuation of this work to her disciple, Rev. Hubert Nearman (Dr. Mark J. Nearman), a former scholar of Japanese drama and a monk for nearly twenty years. They both understood how to do religious translation, as distinct from academic or scholarly translation, and both understood iambic pentameter.

Third, Rev. Kennett created *The Liturgy of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives*, a hymnal for the Order. *The United Methodist Hymnal* noted that “our hymnals serve as instruments by which the spiritual heritage received from the past is celebrated in the present and transmitted to future generations. Next to the Bible, our hymnals have been our most formative resource.”⁷ Similarly, the Unitarian Universalist Association notes in its excellent hymn book, *Singing The Living Tradition*, that “a living faith must have both roots and wings. A hymn book is one place we find both.”⁸ In our liturgy, the roots of this expression of faith are the plainsong melodies and hymn tunes that have held sacred texts for the past five centuries in the West; the wings are the new chants and hymn tunes that have grown naturally from these roots. This aspect—the *Liturgy of the Order*—of Rev. Master Jiyu’s legacy provides a means of expression for a living faith, and of preserving for transmission to future generations the rich spiritual tradition that is Soto Zen. Indeed, what has evolved in our tradition is comparable to what Carl P. Daw, FHS, describes in his preface to *A Hymn Tune Psalter*:

Plainsong melodies, some of which may be traceable to ancient Jewish origins, have conveyed to us (with Latin texts) a priceless body of Judeo-Christian song. Subsequently, at the Reformation, the concern that the sacred texts of the Church be available to ordinary people in the vernacular resulted in two significant developments: 1. Latin chant texts were translated into English and the melodies adapted to fit; and 2. metrical versions of the psalms (precursors of the modern hymn) gained broad popularity. A further refinement of the chant resulted in the eighteenth-century development of what is now known as Anglican chant, facilitating the singing of non-metrical translation of the psalms.”⁹

Rev. Kennett chose plainsong and Anglican chants because they provided a “priceless body” of sacred song which supported scriptural text without getting in the way of the words. In the hope that sacred Buddhist texts be available to Westerners in a natural and “non-foreign” way, scriptures, litanies, offertories,

dedications, and hymns were translated into English, and plainsong melodies were adapted to fit. Metrical versions of the scriptures—the precursors of our growing corpus of Buddhist hymns—gained broader usage, and perhaps popularity. Using Anglican chant, which facilitated the singing of non-metrical texts, she was able to set the fundamental teachings of Buddhism to musical forms not only accessible—but singable!

Western hymn tunes have unfolded from a broad range of cultures and traditions, including Eurocentric, African, Asian, and Native American. Rev. Kennett drew on the wealth of the Christian hymn books to find both musical and textual “vessels” for Buddhist hymns. She did this across a broad ecumenical range, drawing from Catholic, Russian Orthodox, Church of England, Methodist, and Presbyterian tradition, as well as from the Pali chants of Sri Lanka, among others. And she drew, of course, on her own academic and professional experience to write music in the styles in which she had been trained, and in which she had worked for so long.

Our daily scriptures, with two exceptions, are set to Anglican chant. We start the day in our Pre-Dawn Office with *The Scripture of Avalokiteshwara*, a chapter from the Lotus Sutra. Translated into metrical (iambic) English, the text explores the many manifestations of Avalokiteshwara, one expression of compassion in the world. It is set in Tonus Peregrinus, reflecting the peregrinations of this Great Compassion through the many and varied situations of daily life, as well as its resolution for good in all circumstances. The ceremony is an invocation of compassion for the monastic community and for all those in need of giving or receiving compassion.

Our Morning Office gives us the opportunity to reflect on how and why we are doing this practice. It includes *Sandokai*, a poem by Sekito Kisen written in the eighth century, set to chant Tone II, Ending 2. *The Most Excellent Mirror Samadhi*, a longer poem by Tozan Ryoki describing how one should practice, is set to chant Tone VII, Ending 1. The final chant of our Morning Office is the recitation of *The Ancestral Line*, the ninety-one names of the Buddhas and Ancestors through which the Teaching has been transmitted. The names are chanted in Japanese, but instead of the characteristic Japanese percussive monotone, they are chanted with a quiet and unobtrusive improvised harmonic support in I–IV–V. In the concluding offertory for this ceremony “we pray that we may be able to show our gratitude to the Four Benefactors, rescue all beings in the Three Worlds, and make the Four Wisdoms perfect together with all living things. We pray that this Temple may prosper and all misfortune cease.”¹⁰ Each of our ceremonies has a similar offertory, most often sung in simple plainchant, either *a cappella* or with very simple organ accompaniment. Chant also proves itself a worthy vehicle for *The Three*

INVOCATION OF AVALOKITESHIWARA
BODHISATTVA, I

K. Benson.

You Weep in All the Sorrows of the World

Lux vera.— 10 6 10 6.

Rev. J.B. Dykes.

1. You weep in all the sorrows of the world,
Rejoice in all its joys;
In life You're present in all suffering
And cry in all the cries.
2. Rejoice in all the sorrows of the world,
You weep in all its joys.
Oh weep in all the sorrows of the world,
Oh joy in all the joys.
3. In every being's secret, silent heart
You have Your dwelling place
And You cannot be moved, or grasped or fixed
By mind in any space.
4. All those who say they know You not at all,
For all that, know You well:
You are the secret yearning of their hearts
And this they dare not tell.
5. You are Compassion's Source; the going out,
You are the coming in.
No thing escapes You or impedes Your work;
You are the Wondrous Truth.
6. To You we turn, You are the Way, the Goal,
The journey and its end.
Reparder of the cries, Oh guide our hearts
To Peace, our Reaching Home.

Homages which end each of our ceremonies or chants—our “so be it!”

Morning Office is followed by Morning Service, which includes the central scripture of our tradition, *The Scripture of Great Wisdom*. Taken from the Heart Sutra, it is set to Tone III, Ending 1. It is followed by a similar offertory and Homages.

Our morning ceremonies end with the Founder's Ceremony, an expression of gratitude to the Founder of our Temple for making it possible for us to train here. It includes the *Litany of the Great Compassionate One* which calls on the Heart of True Compassion to show us how to express true gratitude for all in our daily life. It is set to chant Tone VII, Ending 2. The final scripture is *The Adoration of the Buddha's Relics*, an expression of gratitude for this teaching and for the opportunity to train. This is set to the *Kontakion for the Departed* from the Russian Orthodox Funeral Service. The music expresses the profound teaching of prayer-full gratitude as the means of honoring those who have gone before. Again, there is a plainchant offertory that asks “may the Offerings we make here show our gratitude and joy to all living things. We pray that the merits thereof shall not only be given to our Founder, but light the way of all who have not yet

found the Truth.”¹¹ The Homages end this ceremony as well.

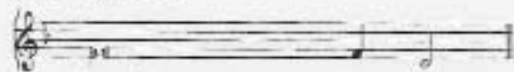
Depending on our liturgical calendar and our daily schedule, we may come together several times throughout the day to sing together. And each evening we close our monastic day with Vespers, sung *a cappella*, which includes the *Litany of the Great Compassionate One* and several other short mantras set to Anglican chant. We are indeed a “singing community.”

Beyond our daily schedule we have a kaleidoscopic calendar of weekly, monthly, and yearly vigils, festivals, and memorials. Chants and hymns are an essential part of these. This is where our hymnal indeed is the instrument “by which the spiritual heritage received from the past is celebrated in the present.”¹²

In our festivals, especially, we *walk* as we chant, underscoring the importance of breath, whether in meditation, in singing, or in “taking the next step.” Through our walking and singing in this way we move toward harmonizing body and mind as we harmonize voices in SATB harmony.

We use Anglican chant extensively in our festival and memorial chants, including the litanies of the various Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and Ancestors that we sing

|| Precentor ||



The Scripture of Great Wis - dom *

|| Musician: Play over the following ||

|| Organ ||

Tone III, ending 1.



|| All ||

When one | with deepest | wisdom of the heart :
 That is beyond dis | criminative thought, ||
 The Holy Lord, — great | Kanzeon Bosatsu, :
 Knew that the skandhas five were, — as they are, — in their
 self-nature, — | void, unstained and pure. ||
 O Shariputra, | form is only pure, :
 Pure is all form; there | is, then, nothing more than this, ||
 For what is form is pure — and | what * is pure is form; :
 The same is also true of all sensation, — thought, ac|tivity and
 consciousness. ||
 O Shariputra, | here all things are pure :
 For they are neither | born nor do they wholly die; ||
 They are not stained nor | yet immaculate; :
 In|creasing not, decreasing not. ||
 O Shariputra, — in this pure there is no form, — sensation, —
 thought, — activity or | consciousness; :
 No eye, — ear, — nose, — tongue, — body, — mind; —
 no form, — no tastes, — sound, — | colour, touch or
 objects; ||
 Vision none; — no consciousness; — no knowledge and
 no | sign of ignorance; :

Tone III, ending 1.



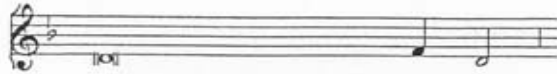
Un-til we come to where old age and death have ceased — and
 so has all ex|tinction of old age and death ||
 For here there is no suffering, — nor yet again is there
 ac|cumulation, :
 Nor again annihilation nor an Eightfold Path, — no | knowledge,
 no attainment ||
 In the mind of the Bosatsu who is truly one with Wisdom Great
 the | obstacles dissolve :
 * And, — going on beyond this human | mind, he is Nirvana. ||
 All the Buddhas True of pres-ent, — past and | future they ARE
 all, :
 Because upon Great Wisdom they rely, — the perfect | and most
 high enlightenment. ||
 The Prajnaparamita one should know — to be the
 Great-est | Mantra of them all, :
 The highest and most peerless Mantra too; — * allayer | of all
 pain Great Wisdom is, ||
 It is the very | Truth, no false-hood here, :
 This is the | Mantra of Great Wisdom, hear! ||
 † O Buddha, going, going, | going on * beyond :
 And always going on beyond, — always be-coming | Buddha.
 Hail! Hail! Hail! ||

throughout our liturgical year. These are taken from several Mahayana sutras that include the Maharatnakuta Sutra (*The Litany of Shakyamuni Buddha* and *The Litany of Manjusri Bodhisattva*), the Lotus Sutra (*The Immeasurable Life of the Tathagata*, *The Scripture on the Conduct that Eases the Way*, or *The Marvellous Spiritual Powers of the Tathagata*), and other sacred texts and writings, such as Great Master Bodhidharma's Discourse on Pure Meditation (*The Litany of Bodhidharma*). Plainchant is used in some of our hymns. One example is "Great Kanzeon, Compassionate One," which is set to VENI, VENI, EMMANUEL mode I. The hymns we use for the Festival of the Avatamsaka Scripture are also sung in plainchant: "Avatamsaka, the Mystic!" using mode VIII, or

"Great and Universal Scripture" using mode I. We also use the mode VIII melody VERBUM SUPERNUM from the Mechlin *Antiphonarium Romanum* for "Within the Meditation Hall," which we sing on the Festival of Manjusri Bodhisattva. And we make use of a mode VIII melody from *Vesperale Romanum* for *Samantabhadra Bodhisattva*.

Building on this legacy, we continue to adapt more of the treasury of sacred Buddhist writings to appropriate plainsong or Anglican chant, and to create our own melodies in a plainchant style as well. We have created new music in this style for the *Shushogi*—in a sense, the Soto Zen "Creed," five chapters compiled from the writings of Eihei Dogen, the Founder of the Soto Zen School of Buddhism, expressing his funda-

|| Precentor ||



Adoration of the Buddha's Re - lics *

|| Organ and all ||



Hom--age to... the... Re---lics of the Budd--ha of



mer-----it..... all; Hom----age to the Bod--y



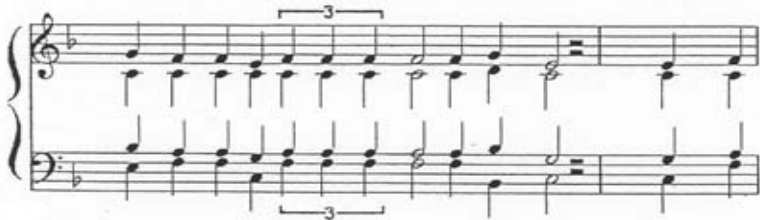
of Truth which is Truth It--self....and a Stup--a for



the World of the Dhar--ma for our pres--ent bod--y.



Through the mer--its of the Budd--ha the Truth



en--ters in--to us and we en--ter the Truth; through the

ex-- cell--ent pow--er of Budd--ha we real--ize Truth.

Let us do on--ly good things for all liv--ing things

that we may poss--ess the true... Mind; let us do

on--ly pure deeds..... that we may en--ter the

peace-----ful Mind which is un--chang----ing Great

Wis--dom; Let us pay hom-----age e--ter--nal--ly

to the Budd--ha, to the Budd--ha, to the Budd--ha.

Great Kanzeon, Compassionate One

Tune: VENI, VENI, EMMANUEL

Great Kanzeon, Compassionate One, All Hail!
We greet Thee on this joyful Day of Days.
In all of life we see Thy hand
Consoling us and all within this land.
All Hail! All Hail! Compassionate One, All Hail!
We greet Thee on this joyful Day of Days.

In trouble, sorrow, always Thou art there
To hear our cries and give us comfort rare.
Thou shinest in the darkest night,
Sustaining us no matter what our plight.
All Hail! All Hail! Compassionate One, All Hail!
We greet Thee on this joyful Day of Days.

When death's dark portal looms before our eyes,
To Thee we look for Thou wilt hear our cries.
Thy helping hand is always there
No matter what; Thy Heart will always care.
All Hail! All Hail! Compassionate One, All Hail!
We greet Thee on this joyful Day of Days.

Great Kanzeon, Compassionate One, All Hail!
We greet Thee on this joyful Day of Days.
In all of life we see Thy hand
Consoling us and all within this land.
All Hail! All Hail! Compassionate One, All Hail!
We greet Thee on this joyful Day of Days.

Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett

mental teachings. We have also set *The Parable of the Herbs* from the Lotus Scripture to an adaptation of a Church of England *Venite*. This text is most appropriate for Thanksgiving or ceremonies expressing gratitude; we have developed the music recently, drawing from the Sarum chants in particular. The texts for these invocations were written specifically for particular festivals, and again the chant form creates a solid platform for the teaching contained in both these beautiful poems.

We have also developed plainchant-based “Invoking Processionals” for the major vigils and festivals of our liturgical calendar. Relatively simple melody and harmonies are repeated in Anglican chant style, as monks process into each ceremony; the words for these are the Sanskrit mantra appropriate to the festival—or their English equivalent if it fits better. We have some chants that are in fact derived from the ancient Pali chants of Ceylon, and we continue to be open to musical inspiration from a wide spectrum of religious traditions, including Celtic and Native American sources. With this kind of new music our ceremonial life continues to grow and flourish.

Shasta Abbey Hymns

As I have mentioned, many hymn tunes have their roots in the metrical psalmody that Calvin and Luther used to make the Psalms more accessible; such hymn tunes are equally appropriate for making the Dharma more accessible, and to that end Rev. Kennett made good use of them. She created hymns not only for our festival ceremonies, but also for the threshold moments, where religion has an essential offering to make. For example, one of our funeral invocations, “Twilight and Evening Star,” is sung to the tune FRESHWATER; Rev. Chushin Passmore built upon the familiar lines of “Crossing the Bar,” adding stanzas that harmonize with Tennyson’s words and express Buddhist teaching on dying, death, and all-acceptance.

Perhaps it was Rev. Master Jiyu’s experience of World War II, or that of giving up her British passport to become an American citizen, or of her life in Japan during the time of the Vietnam war, but whatever the cause, national remembrances are another important part of our ceremonial rota. The President is remembered as one of The Four Benefactors in the blessing we say at each meal; and every month, on the first and the fifteenth, we perform a *Ceremony for the Blessing of the Nation*. So it should not be surprising that we have a treasury of music for such national remembrances as Thanksgiving, all of them adapted from familiar tunes.

In particular, Rev. Kennett drew many of these from *Hymns Ancient and Modern* of 1924. “O Beautiful My Country,” set to AURELIA, is sung with Hosmer’s powerful words unchanged. Rev. Master Jiyu harmonized and arranged the tune ST. BEATRICE for our version of “The Sower Went Forth Sowing”; she used the first stanza of W. St. Hill Bourne’s text, and adapted two stanzas to express Buddhist teaching in metaphors of seed and harvest. She created similar harmonizations and arrangements of GOLDEN SHEAVES for our version of “To Thee, Eternal Lord We Raise,” building on W.C. Dix’s text, and of EWING, for our version of “Within the World Around Us,” building on a text by G. K. Chesterton. On Memorial Day and on Veterans Day (or Remembrance Day, as she knew it) we sing “Day of Remembrance” (CLOISTERS) and “O, Valiant Hearts” (HARRIS) with texts only slightly altered. And more recently, we have created an original text set to FINLANDIA for these national days: “Simha’s Questions (Buddha’s Words on War).” We celebrate the Fourth of July with these invocations, as well as with Gustav Holst’s music and Rev. Kennett’s adapted words to “I Vow to Thee My Country”—an especially apt pairing, since Holst himself had a deep interest in the religions of the East, and many of his works are rooted in Eastern texts and understandings.

Rev. Kennett used not only Western chants and hymn tunes, but also ceremonial forms—when they worked! One of the delightful ceremonies she brought with her from the Anglican tradition, and adapted for use within our own, is the *Ceremony of Nine Lessons*

Simha's Questions

Tune: FINLANDIA

The General came and bowed before the Buddha.
Then asked of warfare, struggle, and of strife.
What is the karma of this conquering spirit?
What is the burden of defending might?
What is the karma of this grasping spirit?
What is the burden of defending mind?

The Buddha, once the warrior prince Gautama,
Well trained in arts of military might,
Answered in words that spoke of self surrender;
Answered in verse that showed a gentler way;
Answered in words that spoke of true surrender;
Answered in verse that showed The Nobler Way.

Who goes to battle, even though 'tis righteous,
Must be prepared for karmic destiny.
So free your mind from holds of fierce delusion.
So yield your fears to great compassion pure.
So free your heart from cru'ity and illusion.
So yield revenge to gratitude, and peace.

Go then courageously and fight the battle,
Living each day the Noble Eightfold Way.
Victory is won in bowing to anicca.
Victory is conquering all the greeds of self.
Victory is won in patiently enduring.
Victory is conquering all the fears of self.

Rev. Helen Cummings

and Carols. We sing this twice a year, on the vigils of the two most important festivals of the Buddhist year, the Festival of the Enlightenment in December, and that of Wesak, the Buddhist New Year, in May. Rev. Kennett wrote much of the music for the hymns that we use at these festivities. She also used several traditional carols for the Wesak songs: "The World Itself Keeps Wesak Day" takes its melody from *Piae Cantiones*, with words adapted from J. M. Neale's Easter hymn, and "Sala Tree" is set to the familiar GREENSLEEVES. We also use the award-winning anthem mentioned earlier, "Joyfully We Greet the Coming," with text by Venerable Sumangalo and Rev. Kennett's music written in 1961. This hymn now appears in Buddhist hymn books throughout the world. We have followed in her footsteps, creating further music for these celebrations from a tune out of the Russian tradition—WE GIVE HONOR AND THANKS. Its glorious joyfulness is particularly appropriate for both our Wesak ceremony and our Enlightenment Day festival.

Given a full liturgical calendar, with festival ceremonies in honor of so many facets of Buddhist teach-

ing, Rev. Kennett not only provided a wealth of hymns for them herself, but encouraged her disciples to write texts as well. A few examples:

"The Lord Returns to our True Home," which we sing in the commemoration of the Buddha's death (Parinirvana), is set to the tune LUTHER, written by Martin Luther. The version we use is that of the Wittenberg *Geistliche Lieder* of 1535. Rev. Master Jiyu wrote the four stanzas of text, reflecting on the Buddha's "return to our True Home."

"Whoever True Kindness," sung at the Festival of Jizo Bodhisattva, is set to the Welsh hymn tune ST. DENIO ("Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise"). The first and last stanzas are adapted from John Bunyan and others; Rev. Master Jiyu wrote the middle three.

On January 1 we celebrate both the Festival of Maitreya Bodhisattva and the secular New Year. For the Maitreya Festival, Rev. Master Daizui MacPhillamy's evocative "There's One Who Waits Beyond the Dream," honoring Vairochana, is sung to the tune MAGNUS, which well complements the reflective iambic text. Rev. Master Daizui also wrote words to RAVENSHAW for the secular New Year, "Time for Celebration"; W. H. Monk abridged the traditional German melody from "Ave Hierarchia" in Weisse's *Ein New Gesengbuchlen* (1531).

Rev. Master Daizui also wrote the text "Lord of Healing, Lord of Light," set to BUCKLAND, which we use for Bhaisajya-guru, the Bodhisattva of Healing; the bright tune fits well with the text reflecting on the vast brilliance of this Bodhisattva.

Because ours is a dynamic and ever-unfolding tradition, our current Abbot, Rev. Eko, has encouraged further development of our music in the spirit of Rev. Kennett. As a result, we have new music for funeral ceremonies, based on ST. COLUMBA, that we shared at the 2005 Conference of The Hymn Society. This traditional Irish melody evokes both grief and its transformation, befitting a funeral or memorial. In writing the text, we gave consideration to our observation that family members or friends attending a Buddhist funeral often are not Buddhist themselves. Thus the language we created strove to be as inclusive as possible, so that all who listen might find comfort and peace.

There are many more. Set to the carol tune THAT ENDRIS NIGHT, "The Founder's Vow" is based on a talk given by our Abbot. "The Birth of the Buddha," a text from Sir Edwin Arnold's *The Light of Asia*, is sung to an original chant melody; setting an original text, "Shakyamuni Found The Meaning of Birth and of Death," to the carol melody PRAISE TO GOD IN THE

The Lord Returns to Our True Home

P. Jiyu Kennett.

(87.87.887.)
Slow ♩ = 72.

M. Luther.
Present form of melody in
Geistliche Lieder (Wittenberg), 1535.

The musical score is arranged in five systems, each consisting of a grand staff with a treble and bass clef. The music is in 4/4 time and G major. The melody is simple and hymn-like, with a steady rhythm. The accompaniment is a simple harmonic support, primarily using chords and moving lines in the bass. The piece concludes with a final cadence.

1. The Lord returns to our True Home,
To Life that is Eternal,
Samsara never more to roam
Nor fear the fires infernal.
Although some grieve and think He dies
His seeming death all death defies;
He goes to Life Supernal.
2. Upon this day our faith is tried
In darkness deep descending;
But darkness cannot long abide
For training brings its ending.
The One True Light is always here,
It brings an end to doubt and fear,
The deepest darkness rending.
3. True faith, within the darkest night,
No matter what our karma,
Will help us on the Path that's right
And keep us from Lord Yama.
Parinirvana is for all
Who wait within the darken'd Hall
And truly learn the Dharma.
4. Within all darkness there is light,
Their aid each other lending,
Though different, both are always bright;
They never were contending.
Beyond them Truth is always crowned,
Parinirvana here is found;
It never has an ending.

HIGHEST, from the Russian tradition, we have an invocation that we can use both on Wesak and, with minor adaptations, on Enlightenment Day. For our Transfer of Merit ceremonies, we use (with her permission) a Loreena McKennitt tune, THE DARK NIGHT OF THE SOUL, that we have harmonized and arranged to the “Dedication of Merit,” a text by Venerable Heng Sure of the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas. We used this for the weekly vigil we held during the declared war in Iraq, as well as for funerals and memorials.

We have also created texts that express the Dharma by taking material from our Abbot’s talks. A talk he gave on Founder’s Day became “The Founder’s Vow,” mentioned earlier; another, given during our Searching of the Heart retreats, we developed into “Ever Joyful, Ever Wise!” set to DIVINUM MYSTERIUM. And, responding to emerging needs, we have begun to create children’s songs for our Dharma School. For exam-

ple, the text “I Am a Link in Buddha’s Golden Chain” by Venerable Sumangalo is set to a tune by Thomas Tallis!

One of the serendipitous effects of having this treasury of music is that the more we sing and take delight in it, the better we sing as a community. And we recognize in this a true opportunity to *harmonize*—literally—body and mind as we make music *together*. Singing together in harmony, learning to sing one’s note, to find one’s place in the tune—these form us as a community, showing forth to others (and reminding us!) what it is like to live together without competition or rivalry. As has been said, you see how a community lives together when you hear it sing. Harmony is the Sangha Treasure!

I realize I have touched upon only a small part of Rev. Kennett’s legacy. Her collected works and their continued unfolding have indeed unlocked Buddhist

scriptures not only for her monastic family but for those interested in opening the door to the Buddha Dharma, whatever their tradition may be, and whatever faith guides their search. Her affirmation of Western chants and hymn tunes has indeed opened the hearts of those who come into contact with this practice.

Her legacy is significant for us, as well as for other Western Buddhist monastics. We at Shasta Abbey, and throughout the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives, have occasion to be grateful for this legacy every time someone from another monastic community or from another Buddhist tradition shares in our ceremonial and expresses appreciation for its truth. Our translations of scripture and the music that carries them serve as the model for several emerging Zen monastic communities. We look forward to offering this dynamic legacy to all who may find it of use, to all who may benefit by it.

In Summary


Let me close by affirming that Western chants and hymn tunes *are* the religious music of the West. From whatever Christian tradition they arise, they are a form of “practical faith,” which opens seeking hearts to that which is larger than the self. Since this is exactly the intention of Buddhist practice, it was inevitable that Buddhist scriptural texts and teaching would find their way to Western chants and hymn tunes. These chants and tunes bring Buddhist scriptures and texts to life in the ways they support and make accessible the fundamental truths of Buddhism, and in the way the music itself opens a path for harmonizing body and mind. Western chants and hymn tunes are indeed “worthy vessels” for Buddhist scriptures and texts.

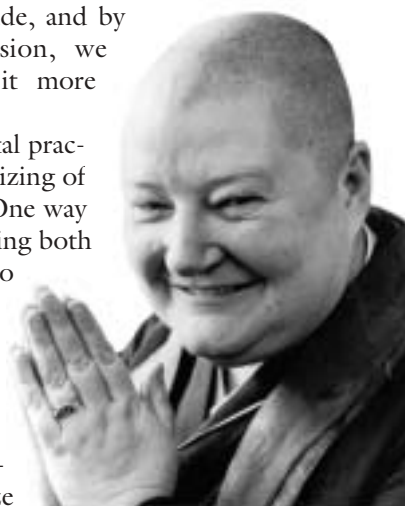
Music, chanting, song—all are an apt and wondrous means of religious expression, a means of translating faith and the words of faith, quite in keeping with Buddhist tradition and quite in place in Shasta Abbey ceremonial. The result in our liturgy is that we *mean* what we are singing. Even if we don’t “get” the words, we recognize their wholeheartedness: “I never heard the words before but I know what they mean.” Authentic search recognizes authentic search; authenticity does recognize authenticity.

As in all things in Buddhism, it is *the attitude of mind that is the heart of any chanting, singing or ceremony*. Form always embodies the mind of meditation. The ceremonies are *not* magic or magical. “They are not meant to hypnotize the participants into apathy. The mind should become quiet, clear and receptive, so that it may know what is beyond concepts and beneath activities. In this experience mind and body must both participate. . . . [So] each morning the whole community comes together and sings the scriptures that are at the heart of the teaching. After a surprisingly short time, one begins to memorize them and they are thus always available. . . . Ceremonies are a means of

expressing gratitude, and by giving it expression, we come to know it more deeply”¹³

Our fundamental practice is the harmonizing of body and mind. One way we do this is to bring both body and mind to our chanting. We literally have to voice our faith. Indeed, those familiar with the Benedictine tradition will recognize this as being quite in line with St. Benedict’s Rule:

“. . . and let us sing in such a way that our minds are in harmony with our voices.”¹⁴ 



Rev. Jiyu-Kennett.
Courtesy of Shasta Abbey

*Wishing that all sentient beings may live in harmony,
as well as harmonize the general multitudes,
without any obstruction whatsoever
and that all shall respect the sacred Sangha.*

Rev. Helen Cummings, a disciple of Rev. Eko Little, has been a monk since 1999. She is the organist at Shasta Abbey.

Musical examples and hymn texts © Shasta Abbey. Used by permission.

Notes

¹Kennett, Peggy T. N. “Music is Zen” in *The Middle Way* (London: London Buddhist Society, n. d.), 57.

²The bulk of her work is available in *The Liturgy of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives for the Laity* (Mount Shasta, CA: Shasta Abbey Press, 1990) and in *The Monastic Office* (Mount Shasta, CA: Shasta Abbey Press, 1993).

³Frank Burch Brown, “How Moveable is the Feast?” *THE HYMN*, 55:4 (October 2004), 9.

⁴Bhikkhu Dhammasami, “The Practice of Chanting in Buddhism,” www.nibbana.com/dmasami3.htm.

⁵Brown, *HYMN* 55:4, 10.

⁶Austin Lovelace, *The Anatomy of Hymnody* (Chicago: G.I.A. Publications, Inc., 1965), 103–104.

⁷Introduction to *The United Methodist Hymnal* (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 1989), v.

⁸Introduction to *Singing The Living Tradition* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), vii.

⁹Carl P. Daw, Jr., and Kevin R. Hackett, *A HymnTune Psalter, Book One: Advent through the Day of Pentecost* (New York: Church Publishing Inc., 1998), v (emphasis mine).

¹⁰*Liturgy of the Order*, 69.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 86.

¹²*United Methodist Hymnal*, v.

¹³Liner notes accompanying “Scriptures and Ceremonies at Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey,” audio CD (Hexham, UK: Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey, 2004).

¹⁴Joan Chittister, OSB, *The Rule of Benedict: Insights for the Ages* (New York: Crossroad, 1999), 19.2.