

the bodhayati vihara buddhist centre



Sarva he! (Smile)
Welcome to the Bodhayati School of Buddhism


"Rare it is to meet with the Dharma, ultimate and profound. Now is the time to perceive, understand and awaken. Noble sangha in relaxed concentration, sit at the centre of all universes, a rainbow body. Dwell in emptiness, and bask in the light of your unborn awareness". Ven. Edo Shonin (Co-founder & Abbot)

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Taking Some Time!

"Take time to stop. Take time to breathe. Take time to relax and enjoy. Constantly ask yourself where is my mind? Am i aware of it? Am i awake? Gently bring the mind back to the present moment. Be gentle with yourself. Be patient".
Ven. Edo Shonin & Ven. William Van Gordon

An Internet Controversy?

Occasionally, we get requests from new Sangha members or people interested in visiting the centre that relate to some defamatory material posted on a small number of websites.

So, rather than respond to these questions on an individual basis we have thought it would be helpful to address them all together in a question and answer format.

Q. So, what is all the controversy about?

Well, there isn't a controversy really. In May 2007, a two page article was published in the Daily Mail entitled "The cult guru who stole my son". The story was provided to the Daily Mail by Ven. William Van Gordon's mother. In brief, the article alleged that Ven. Edo Shonin had brainwashed Ven. William and that the Buddhist monastery and retreat that they lived and taught at was a cult. As part of the allegations of cult and brainwashing, the article also made numerous other claims stating or implying for example that Ven. Edo Shonin was not an authentic Buddhist monk, that he had misled people and that he pretended to have cancer for example.

After an extensive examination of the facts and evidence as part of libel proceedings in the high court, the newspaper settled just before going to trial and the Daily Mail published an apology and paid substantial costs and damages to Ven. Edo Shonin and Ven. William Van Gordon: A copy of the apology can be found here: http://www.carter-ruck.com/Media%20Law/Recent_Work_Archive.asp?year=2009

Simply Being with Nothing to Be

*Nowhere to go, nothing to do
No reputation to build, none to defend
No possessions to amass, none to protect
This is fearlessness born of Apranihita*

*Simply here, simply now
Simply birth, simply death
Simply content, simply aware
Simply abiding, simply being*

*No time, no space
So no here, no now.
No self, no other
So no attachment, no aversion.*

*Letting go with nothing to let go of
Practice with no path to walk
Simply being with nothing to be
This is the all pervading wisdom of
Dharmadhatu*

*By Ven. Edo Shonin
& Ven. William Van Gordon*

Q. So what is source of the various defamatory materials on the internet then?

In brief, the allegations made in the Daily Mail article have been replicated or expanded upon on a small number of websites. In some cases the websites are hosted anonymously but the principle websites involved belong to individuals calling themselves "the Hoodie Monks", there is also a website called "the Buddhist Channel" based in Malaysia, and there are several other websites all of a similar nature with chat and blog type forums. We understand that an individual known as Kevin Malone (or Kobutsu Malone) is one of the central figures behind the propagation of the material across the internet and who is either directly affiliated with (as in the case of the Buddhist Channel) or at least has contacts or connections with this network of websites. We understand that some of the individuals who call themselves the "Hoodie Monks" are also students of Kevin Malone.

Q. The material seems to state or suggest that Ven. Edo Shonin only pretends to be called Ven. Edo Shonin but is actually called Edward Penney. So what is this all about?

Basically, this is complete nonsense! It is correct that Ven. Edo Shonin was named Edward Penney at birth. Edo Yamato Shonin was the name he adopted upon becoming a monk and it subsequently also became his legal name. It is completely normal and commonplace for a Buddhist monk to adopt a new name upon becoming a monk. This is known as a Dharma name.

Q. The websites state that Ven. Edo has claimed to be Japanese, that he has claimed to have been born to a Buddhist family and also that he has claimed to have been a monk since the age of 5 years old. So, what's the truth behind this?

Sorry to disappoint but once again this is completely incorrect. For three years beginning in 2006, Ven. Edo Shonin was the abbot at a Buddhist monastery and retreat in North Wales (called Pine Forest Sangha). The monastery launched a website that was developed and maintained by a number of volunteers who also assisted with other promotional type activities which sometimes included responding to visitor enquires for example. For a very brief period in 2006, it is correct that the website contained a few harmless and minor mistakes and inaccurately described Ven. Edo as being Japanese and as being a monk since the age of 5 years. Part of the content of the website was directly replicated to form a leaflet. As soon as the mistake was identified the website was immediately corrected. The leaflet was likewise withdrawn from circulation, corrected and then reissued accordingly.

It is probably useful to mention that Ven. Edo Shonin had very little to do with the creation and maintenance of the website and other matters of this nature. His time was occupied with compiling and guiding the teaching and practice program as well as with spending time with the many visitors and Sangha members.

In other words, this is a matter that has been blown completely out of proportion and originates from a minor mistake made by people volunteering their time to support and further the objectives of the monastery. In the case of all of these allegations, we would definitely recommend any reader to apply just a modicum of common sense. For example, it is absolutely absurd that Ven. Edo, a white Caucasian male from Scotland (pictured [here](#)) would ever claim to be Japanese or part Japanese! It is even more absurd that anybody would actually believe such a claim!

Q. So are you saying that there is no substance to all of this fuss?

In short, yes. In the region of 99% of the numerous visitors and Sangha members of Pine Forest Sangha (many of whom still practice with Ven. Edo Shonin and Ven. William Van Gordon) have confirmed that Ven. Edo had never stated nor indicated that he was Japanese, nor that he had claimed to have been a monk since the age of 5 nor that he had been born into a Buddhist family. In fact, the overwhelming majority of people practicing with Ven. Edo Shonin (including many very experienced Buddhist practitioners and meditators) report his teachings and presence to be profoundly inspiring, calming and deeply spiritual. A large number of people wrote letters, statements or accounts of their time and experience of being with Ven. Edo Shonin and these were submitted as part of the legal proceedings.

Q. So, I take it that Ven. William Van Gordon harbours some resentment towards his family due to them causing a highly defamatory story to be published in the newspaper?

No, absolutely not. Ven. William is very grateful for the upbringing, warmth and support he received from his parents. Great Britain is not really a culture where it is common for young men or women to turn to a monastic way of life let alone a Buddhist monastic way of life. It is therefore completely understandable that his parents showed concern when he began to devote his life towards spiritual practice. To quote Ven. William: *"Not being familiar with the often direct, sometimes unorthodox and very down to earth teaching style of many great Buddhist masters, it is unfortunate but at the same time understandable that my parents are unable to recognise that Ven. Edo is in fact a highly skilled and realized teacher with an indescribable amount of natural and unconditional compassion for all sentient beings"*.

Q. At least one website mentioned above features a letter from the Japanese Nipponzan Myohoji tradition that basically states that Ven. Edo was only ordained as a "probationer monk". So what's this all about?

After the publication of the Daily Mail article in 2007, but before the apology was published in 2009, the contents of the article were replicated and expanded upon on some other websites as referred to above. In other words, the publication of the article prompted a flurry of activity amongst a relatively small group of individuals frequenting Buddhist chat and blog type websites.

Consequently, the Nipponzan Myohoji tradition, with whom Ven. Edo had been ordained in 2002, began to receive a number of requests relating to both Ven. Edo Shonin's involvement and ordination with that tradition. The letter from the Nipponzan Myohoji states that Ven. Edo Shonin was ordained as a "probationer monk". The letter also even attempts to deny the authenticity of any previous correspondence about the matter from the Nipponzan Myohoji.

However, the Nipponzan Myohoji had previously issued a letter from Osaka Temple itself (the temple where Ven. Edo was ordained after spending a long time in training with the Nipponzan Myohoji) confirming that Ven. Edo Shonin was ordained as a monk and with no reference to the term "probationer". Detailed analysis (undertaken in relation to the legal proceedings) of over 100 photographs of Ven. Edo Shonin's ordination ceremony confirm that the ordination was full and authentic. It appears that the more recent letter from the Nipponzan Myohoji, as well as the somewhat ambiguous and subsequent introduction of the term "probationer", was written in an attempt to 'distance themselves' from any involvement with Ven. Edo Shonin whilst he was at the receiving end of a number of malicious and highly slanderous allegations.

Notwithstanding the disappointing fact that the letter from the Nipponzan Myohoji is in itself defamatory, the exact nature of Ven. Edo Shonin's ordination with the Nipponzan Myohoji is actually of no particular significance. In other words, Ven. Edo Shonin has never stated or implied that he is an ongoing representative of the Nipponzan Myohoji. Whilst it is correct that Ven. Edo Shonin has been ordained within and/or maintains connections with various different Buddhist traditions, he has chosen not to be fixed or restricted by any one particular mode of practicing.

Q. There are also references to Ven. Edo Shonin and Ven. William Van Gordon being ordained under Master Draythep Chantawanno in Northern Thailand and to Ven. Edo Shonin being at Plum Village in the South of France.

We seem to get this question quite a few times but we are not really sure what point the originators of the websites might be trying to make. The fact is that the ordination abovementioned is one of the ordinations received by Ven. Edo Shonin and Ven. William. Further Ven. Edo Shonin did spend almost a year living at the Plum Village monastery in the South of France which is headed by the Vietnamese Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh.

Q. So, if all of this stuff is defamatory, and is basically a load of nonsense that has been spread across the internet by a small network of individuals, then why don't you write to them?

As it happens, we have written to the Buddhist Channel outlining many of the points detailed above. They have thus far chosen not to publish any of the other side of the story. In fact, they have even chosen not to withdraw the original newspaper article which the Daily Mail has since withdrawn, apologized for, and paid out damages accordingly. The simple fact of the matter is that the vast majority of the material published on these websites is highly defamatory.

Q. So are you considering taking legal action against the perpetrators?

As for further legal action there are numerous factors that need to be considered. The main factors that need to be taken into account are the credibility of the offending individual and/or organization and therefore the 'believability' or potential impact of the defamatory material. A further factor is the financial status of the originator. Libel proceedings are notoriously expensive and the costs often run into £100,000's. In other words, we would have to be confident that the defendant would be able to afford to pay our costs and

damages. Whilst we have recently made contact with libel specialists in both Malaysia and the US, for the time being we have decided just to make the necessary provisional enquiries. We will continue to monitor and review the situation on an ongoing basis in order to determine whether it is advisable to formally commence proceedings.

Q. But aren't some people of the view that Buddhist Monks are not supposed to engage in litigation?

Before Ven. Edo Shonin and Ven. William Van Gordon decided to commence legal action in respect of the various allegations, certain individuals involved in propagating those allegations said that they must be true because otherwise Ven. Edo and Ven. William would commence libel proceedings. However, when Ven. Edo Shonin and Ven. William Van Gordon did in fact commence libel proceedings the same people then said that they should not do so because they are Buddhist monks!

Nevertheless the above is certainly a valid question and so it is to be noted that Ven. Edo Shonin and Ven. William Van Gordon always prefer to find means to resolve a problem without recourse to expensive and time consuming legal action. In fact, the choice to engage in legal action is not one to be taken lightly. To quote part of a recent Dharma talk by Ven. Edo Shonin: *"As spiritual practitioners, we should do our best to turn all obstacles onto the path. This means that in the face of adversity we should use the opportunity to cultivate patience, understanding and compassion towards those who we perceive as causing us harm. In fact, we should try to see such individuals as our greatest teachers. In such circumstances, we should be especially aware and take as much time as is needed to consider the full consequences of our thoughts, words and actions. Any form of response should be completely free of the concepts of right and wrong, of perpetrator and victim, or of self and other. Our actions in such situations should be conducted with a complete understanding, or ideally a full realization of the emptiness of all phenomena and should be infused with the unconditional and imperturbable compassion that arises from dwelling in this right view"*. In other words, had Ven. Edo Shonin and Ven. William Van Gordon chosen not to teach the Dharma but to enter into solitary retreat, then there would be little need for them to even think about legal action in order to establish the malicious and untruthful nature of these allegations.

The list of allegations addressed above is by no means exhaustive but we have attempted to address the principle ones. Should you require any further information then please feel free to visit our centre here in Nottingham.