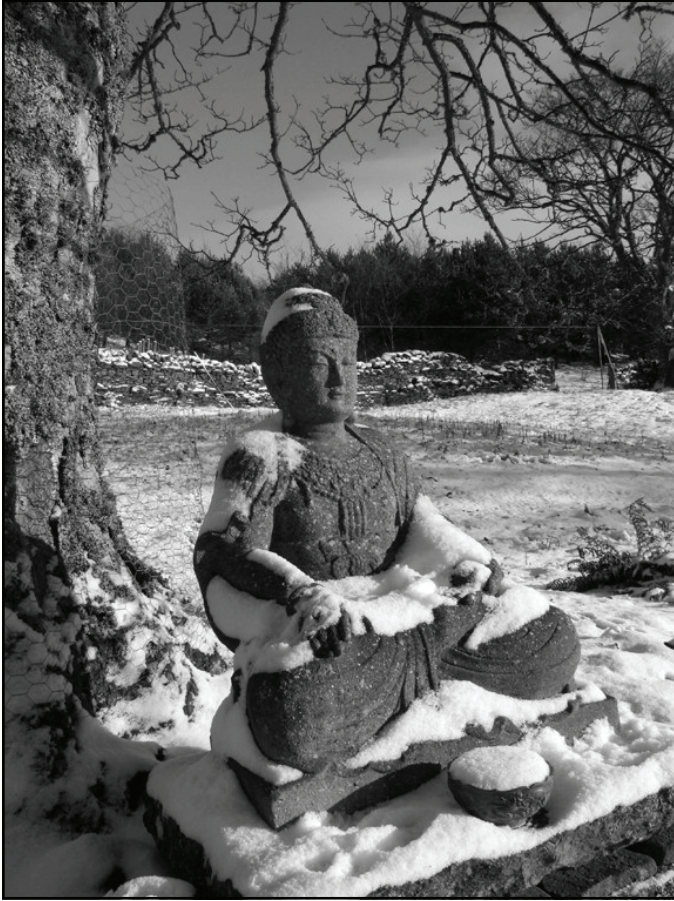


—Portobello Buddhist Priory—



A Temple of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives



*Snow-covered sitting Buddha, Throssel Hole
(with thanks to Jenny Smith)*

Calendar of Events January-April 2012

Portobello Buddhist Priory
27 Brighton Place, Portobello
Edinburgh, EH15 1LL
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email: favian.straughan@homecall.co.uk
website: www.portobellobuddhist.org.uk

– Welcome to all –

Portobello Buddhist Priory, a ground floor flat in the Portobello district of Edinburgh, opened in 1998. It is one of a handful of temples in Britain which are affiliated to the Community of Buddhist Contemplatives. The training monastery of the Community at Throssel Hole near Hexham in Northumberland was founded in 1972 by Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett, an Englishwoman who trained within the Soto Zen tradition at one of its main monasteries in Japan. The resident Prior at Portobello is one of the senior monks from Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey.

The purpose of the Priory is to offer lay training within the Serene Reflection Meditation tradition (Soto Zen) to anyone who sincerely seeks to undertake it, and the prior's role is to support such training. The prior and members of the congregation are also involved in activities such as religious education, hospital and prison visiting.

All are warmly invited to join in the Priory's programme of lay practice, the purpose of which is to come to know and live from our True Nature, whose expression is our wise and compassionate living.

With kindest wishes from Rev Favian, Prior

(For details of the day-to-day schedule at the Priory, please see back page)

- Weekend events at the Priory -

January 2012

Sunday 8th Renewal of Precepts 11am

February

Sunday 12th Renewal of Precepts 11am

March

Sunday 11th Renewal of Precepts 11am

April

Sunday 29th Wesak: Festival of the Buddha's birth 11am

The Priory is open to visitors as well as trainees every day from
6.45am - 9.15pm
except Mondays, Thursday afternoons, and Sunday pm.

*(Please phone beforehand, and please note when the Prior
is holding retreats elsewhere)*

— *Prior's Notes* —

“Deep within the conflicted heart of Man, lies the dwelling place of the Buddhas. Let our practice keep faith with this truth, and may we pay close attention to its prompting”.

This dedication was used at our Memorial ceremony on Remembrance Sunday. We also ended our meditation with an offering of Merit for all who have suffered due to war and conflict.

The ‘conflicted heart’ is our personal battleground, where our fears and desires play out. We can look out at the world from this ‘place’, with a sense of threat and view our situation as a source of fear; one to be fought over and possessed. This push and pull and its karmic consequences lead to suffering for ourselves and for those we involve.

This happens because, in a sense we haven’t looked deeply enough into this ‘heart’, and so instead react from a sense of our separate nature, a fragment in a fractured world.

Tragically, our grasping and rejection of this world is an attempt to gain wholeness, as it were, from the outside in. Following this path, impermanence confirms our fractured vision; we experience everything grasped after as slipping through our fingers .

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Our practice can reveal another world and transform our reactive and selfish behaviour. We turn the light of our seeking for wholeness within. We tune into the deeper instinct of our being; the Bodhicitta, manifesting as the truth seeking mind. It is important that we do this in faith, because faith can carry us beyond the sticking place of fear and desire and reach deeply into the ‘dwelling place of the Buddhas’. This refuge embraces the movement of fear and desire and can dissolve their agitation in the reality of its wholeness.

A new vision of the world can arise, fuelled, not by

grasping and aversion, but by compassion and wisdom. The ‘voice’ of this Buddha can seem so quiet, and so easily overwhelmed by the clatter and roar of the selfish mind, yet with practice, our capacity to tune in, to pay close attention to its prompting, can increase. The world now is not the war zone it seemed to be. It has always been the Buddha land, even in the midst of pain. And our deepest instinct is revealed not to end in grasping and rejecting. Now, from the treasure house of our true nature, we are free to give, and so our meditation ends with an offering of merit to all who suffer the consequences of war.

Priory Finances

The Priory recently had its annual financial audit. This showed that, in the past year, our donations have gone down by more than £2,000, when tax reclaim is taken into account. We still have around £12,500 in our bank accounts, which is used to pay maintenance bills such as the replacement gas boiler last year (£3,000) and an up-and-coming building repair (about £4,000). The

gift aid scheme can be used for both begging bowl donations and standing orders and allows the Priory to reclaim tax on these, for donors who pay tax. In these times of recession, it is often not easy to find money for donations and all gifts, either large or small, are gratefully received.

Neil Rothwell



Do not hold back —

At the end of last Wednesday’s dharma evening when we had listened to Rawdon’s poem on the Avatamsaka Sutra, Rev. Favian asked us not to hold back with our offerings, so what came up for me was poetry itself.

The arising of poetry seems to be something that comes up very naturally,

really not the thinking mind involved in; 'I am going to write a poem.' More that something comes up as a gift. Over the years, especially if I am wakeful at night and need to sit; or if walking along the beach allowing the natural world to soothe and refresh.....

*Walking along the morning tide
the wind and waves they make my stride.*

That was one of the first poems that arose when we moved to Portobello 24 years ago. Nothing fancy or complicated, a simple gift.

Reading poetry, on the other hand, serious poetry (not rhymes for children which I know and love) still has some associations with times in my early life when I was unhappy. Sitting up late at night, smoking and drinking coffee, and reading poetry. Is that just what Rev. Favian calls a Xeroxed memory, repeated and unexamined for so long that it seems set in stone?

To embrace this moment, the hold on those memories needs to loosen up. Sometimes just beginning to allow the memories there is a knot in my stomach; opening up to the knot allows it to untangle.

So what is this about? ME. Of course. While the arising gifts seem to be from not me, a deeper place altogether.

In the Nursery we used to say that it was process not product. Realising over and over again that there is no possible completely perfected ME, who understands all of those old experiences and who is miraculously going to appear, wise and wonderful. And that this is just fine, no need to worry.

So this is the latest arising, at 3.00a.m. looking out of the back door.

*Gazing open mouthed at the moon
a laughing fool.
Filled with wonder and delight
here in Portobello.*

In gassho,

Kathleen Campbell

The Segaki toro¹ flames were being whipped around in the autumn evening wind.

As we sang the Scripture of Great Wisdom I could almost sense that the connection I had written into the poem for my mum was being burned up. It felt as if something deep in my body was somehow moving with the flames, the subtle echo of something felt physically.

Earlier in the week, during a tea, Rev Olwen had suggested that we approach the ceremony without preconceptions, and just ask in meditation who should be included. As well as the names that were to be read out during the ceremony, there was also the possibility to have a paper memorial tablet on the altar, and this would be burned in the toro the evening after the Segaki ceremony. Rev Olwen also suggested that if there were any particular aspects of the relationship that we wished to let go, we could write a personal message for the toro.

Three friends had died over the summer, so early in the week I was sur-

prised, when mum, in the form of her maiden name, seemed to be the most important person for me to add to the list to be read out. Mum died 6 years ago, and I thought that all was at peace with her and with the connection between us. In the sittings that followed there was a slight tension in meditation, a sense that there was more to be done about this, but it was not clear what was required. It was a bit like meditating before a dharma interview, letting go of the thinking that was trying to grasp after a resolution and just being as open as possible. Later that day (it may have been next morning), it seemed that I should make a memorial tablet too, with my mum's married name on it. As the papers had already been passed to the sacristy, I had to overcome my normal resistance to being seen to make a fuss, before pestering a busy Rev Leandra to find out what to do.

As the sittings went by, again there was the sense that there was more to do, and eventually it seemed that I should also write something for the toro. I had done things like this before

¹ *The Segaki toro is a ceremony involving a fire within which the memorial tablets that were part of the Segaki altar are burned. It is held outside on the evening after the autumn Segaki ceremony.*

and although I told myself that I had no doubts about their value, if only on a psychological level, I had always held part of myself in reserve as an observer. Over time I think the reservation had turned into a subtle kind of cynicism, an active expression of doubt.

Time was running out and I knew that I had to get my poem to the sacristy by next morning, the day of the ceremonies. In the evening rest period I sat in my room trying to find the words. I found apt words that captured the devotion and the many sacrifices mum had given to her life's work of raising 5 children in difficult circumstances. I also reflected the times late in her life when we had opened our hearts to each other, then I got stuck trying to find a way to finish the poem. Again there was the tension of knowing that there was something that needed to be expressed, but of only being clear that what I had written so far was not enough.

At this point my room-mate Doug came in for some tea. We had shared the room for 5 days, but apart from practicalities, we had both observed the silent spirit of the retreat. Doug began to speak and although part of me said; "don't bother me, I'm trying

to finish something", it seemed like a good time to put aside the retreat guidelines and get to know each other a bit. I told Doug what I was doing and we talked about our families.

Doug explained how, in a eulogy for his mum, he had managed to incorporate both his love and some difficult and painful things. Reading it out at the funeral had been like speaking from the stillness, so he must have found the right path through this dangerous ground. Particularly at a funeral, it can be difficult to distinguish between truths that need expression, and passing emotionality which can cause serious harm if not let go. I felt confused as I sensed that Doug had pointed me in the right direction, but was afraid of saying something destructive. Although part of me really wanted to finish the job, I was willing to trust that now was not the time.

As always in Sesshin, there were different themes playing out in the fantasies, memories, and worries that arise in meditation. Two themes, familiar friends known for many years, were prominent. These were fantasies about my doing something that would gain the approval of others and a very dark, angry and violent response to not getting my own way.

On this occasion I was noticing the more emotional aspect of the fantasies about being heroic. Some small incident involving one of the people I was interacting with on the Retreat would come to mind, and I would catch myself fantasising about offering some act of kindness, perhaps just a word or a friendly smile of encouragement. Next I would notice the start of an emotional response in my body, perhaps a slight flushing feeling in the neck, as if I had been moved by the film I had just watched in my thoughts. Turning towards the feeling I would see that there was nothing to be found of the emotion, other than the bodily response which was already passing, and that my thoughts had already moved on. I have known for some time that I can find myself acting out these kinds of fantasies in life, particularly with people who I would like to impress, and that there is probably a connection with mum. One of my earliest memories is as a young child playing at making cups of tea for mum as she worked around the house. I would offer a cup of tea and say "I'm a good boy aren't I?", and getting the confirmation I was seeking, would feel the security of being loved.

The angry and violent responses would arise when turning awareness away from a fantasy object of desire in

meditation. Finding myself drifting into a fantasy, I would try to follow Rev Master Daishin's teaching of turning away from the thoughts to look at what it was that was doing the thinking. This could feel like quite an effort, and within the revealed sense of "ungraspability", I would at times catch glimpses of something wild and violent. I am not going to describe the details of this, other than to say that it was like a very peculiar kind of mental imagery, located deep in my hara, and with wild energy consuming and wreaking violent destruction on both the desired object and the world in general. Once I became aware of this it seemed to have a life of its own. Almost in the background, it would remain active whilst awareness returned to the rest of my body, the environs, thoughts etc. The antics would continue for a while, sometimes becoming so extreme that they were almost funny, and then would fade away. At times the specifics would transform into a familiar, almost physical, sense of desperate, objectless grasping. These are classic Hungry Ghost mind states.

I can no longer remember the details, but during the meditation periods on the morning of the Segaki ceremony it became clear that these two themes were intimately intertwined in the

form of a connection between me and mum. I know from things that have arisen previously in meditation that I was desperately hungry for love as a tiny baby (perhaps in a way that was insatiable), and that this was part of an older story of beings seeking and rejecting love in the most extreme ways. As an adult, from what I have learned about that time, I know that mum was juggling my needs with illness, financial hardship, the needs of three other children and a difficult relationship. It became clear that being a “good boy” was the way that I learned to get affection and that the “bad boy” aspects of childhood were hidden away as not being worthy of love. I recognised that the fear of being seen as a “bad boy” continued into adulthood, leading to exaggerated concern for how I think others see me and to occasional outbursts of callous action that left me feeling confused.

I now realise that there was something here that was seeking expression, something that I was afraid to let loose because of the havoc it might cause. Of course, such things can only be hidden away and not really suppressed, as they find ways to break out on their own terms. If I look back I can find woven into many aspects of my life, a pattern of alternating asceticism and indulgence. Although over the years

the extremes have softened, I now see more deeply how neither of these positions is the Buddha’s middle way. There is a place in the world for the energy I was encountering, which, at bottom, is just the movement of life. It does not need to be expressed in the form of a Hungry Ghost, and can do noble service, when guided by wisdom. It was now clear that I could finish the poem very simply, just by adding to all the positive sentiments I had expressed by signing off “from your bad boy”.

If I reflect on the two weeks I spent at Throssel, the main theme seems to be a greater willingness to trust. Odd as it seems, I first noticed this when singing vespers at the meditation group. For some time I have been singing with more commitment, and in a very straightforward way, noticed that doing this makes the meaning of the ceremonies more obvious. During my stay at the Abbey, I became more aware of how I was activating doubt, and the choices that I was making that gave energy to this. As with singing the scriptures, I noticed how this approach revealed more depth when applied in other areas.

Trusting that I could stay in my sitting place whilst interacting with others, revealed flashes of the exquisite ten-

derness that can exist between people in ordinary daily life. Being open to the teaching of others, directly as with Rev Olwen's advice, or indirectly as in the conversation with Doug, opened up a route into some previously unexplored territory. What arose in meditation during the week became clear only in stages, when it was relevant to the par-

ticular circumstances of the time, requiring action from the darkness of faith. The coherent narrative that I have described only became apparent in retrospect and is not really necessary for the basic understanding that trust is the basis of real love.

Bob McGraw



Debbie Sheringham
November '11

No Separation

Tonight's lecture in the Playfair Library is 'Making a Success of Childhood' by Sir Harry Burns, Chief Medical Officer for Scotland and a self-effacing, good man, whose stated mission is the improvement of the welfare and health of our society, in particular of our children.

Sir Harry illustrates with some stark evidence the effects of unskillful parental behaviour during the first years of childhood. I experience a sensation as if the door behind me has opened and cold air is drafting on the back of my neck. I wonder how my parents helped to shape me and in turn how I might have been a better father.

Dr Burns' last slide asks – how do we create a compassionate society?

I have no answer to this big question but I wonder - If we accept that all things are connected and understand the way in which our actions affect others, we might behave in a more skillful manner. We might also accept the way in which the actions of others have impacted on us without attaching blame, but being willing to forgive.

Earlier, at work I made a silent vow to curb my seemingly inbuilt desire to control. One of our clients wanted to change a design detail of a building's interior and I was blustering and spluttering in righteous indignation and sheer-affrontedness. Where did that come from? I wondered as I listened to this conscious prodding lecture. I was looking for someone to blame I think. I remembered Rev Master Daishin discussing 'blame' in one of his recent talks.

This morning I noticed without judgement that it was darker and a wee bit colder when I lit a stick of incense for meditation.

When I reflect on this 'normal' day I see that I started out reasonably serenely, then went through moments of being a bit testy, thoughtful and even compassionate. I felt some fear and a smidgeon of guilt and eventually went to bed in a good mood, which is pretty much my default mode. These emotions were not entirely unconnected nor were the incidents completely separate, each arose one from the other and merged moment to moment into each other.

The point is - there seems to be no separation between our practice and daily life. It feels like training allows us to be in life somewhere between the definitely and the probably, the middle way perhaps, where faith and doubt can exist together. And the acknowledgement of which might just make us a little more compassionate.

David Campbell



Monkey Puddle

The water warm, un-rippled wraps around
her tired limbs and spine with blessed heat.
She waits with steam and snow - without a sound,
un-awed by nature's geothermal feat:
A monkey in its element still free
of academic hells and man-made strife,
her simple blessings seem more joy to me
than all the 'benefits' of modern life.

A bald-ape cannot climb a tree
or free me from my sisters' hate.
It could not offer much to me.
They do not groom. We could not mate.
Still I will do this ape no harm
here in a puddle feigning calm.

Andrew Elliott

Founders Festival, 6th & 7th November

The recent Founders Festival at Throssel Hole Abbey celebrated the lives of both Rev. Master Houn Jiyu and her Zen Master, Keido Chisan. Saturday was dedicated to Rev. Master Keido Chisan, and Rev. Master Hugh Gould, who was the celebrant, held a question and answer session with the residents that afternoon. He told us a few biographical details about this great Japanese abbot. One was the touching pet name of 'little daikon (radish)' which he was given as a child, presumably because of his small stature (and rosy complexion?) Another fact was that he had been devoted to improving access to education for girls and women in Japan and also to spreading Zen Buddhism in the west. These facts help explain why he was so willing to invite and sponsor the young Peggy Kennett to come to his monastery in Tokyo to study.

When I originally read 'The Wild, White Goose', Rev. Master Jiyu's account of her time in Japan, I had been very struck and indeed moved, by the way that Rev. Master Keido had constantly protected his student/disciple, by standing up to the monastery officials who were so against a woman, and especially a foreign woman, train-

ing in their monastery. I now wanted to re-read parts of the account which could perhaps help me understand both the suffering, seemingly inflicted on Rev. Master Jiyu, and also the bond between disciple and master, between herself and Rev. Master Keido Chisen. I did not know what I would find, but, unsurprisingly, it was what I myself need for my present stage on the Zen path.

In Book 3, 'The Parish Priest' (p286) Rev. Master Jiyu goes to see the Temple Director when she feels overwhelmed by all the difficulties with which she is confronted. In her own words she says: "It was as if all the injustices of the past few years were oozing out of me like the pus from a boil." The Director replies to her tirade: "Long ago I taught to you the 'Sandokai' – 'with the ideal comes the actual like a box with its lid.' It seems you are still, to a certain extent, stuck with the ideal. ... You must *know* the ideal; you must *accept* the actual. Only thus can you help others and yourself. Things are as they are because of the greed, hate and delusion of the world. The only people we can do anything about are ourselves."

In Book 4, 'The Eternal Bo Tree,' Rev.

Master Jiyu, has to explain to Harry, the newsletter editor,(p361), the history of the bureaucracy in Japanese temples and how the temple officials who deal with it may appear to be doing this merely as a job, rather than furthering their training, but that there are also those who genuinely strive for true Zen. Harry later asks whether she thinks that any of the things that were done to her in the early days in the Tokyo temple were done deliberately in order to get her to react in specific ways.(p388) Rev. Master Jiyu replies: "...No true Zen master, no true Zen trainee, ever manipulates anybody. The koan arises *naturally* in daily life; we don't *need* to give it any false assistance. ...Everything the trainee does tells the master something about the trainee. The master notes these things and uses them to point the way for the trainee to his *naturally True* state. That which arose *naturally* for me in the Tokyo temple was the fact that I was a woman and a foreigner in a Japanese man's temple. It was a natural problem, given the culture here, a natural koan; it needed no manipulation whatsoever."

Earlier, (p382) Rev. Master Jiyu explains the relationship between master and disciple. ... "The master and disci-

ple are one, completely and utterly one. They may be different in time; one may have been born physically at an earlier time to the other; but they are reborn every moment that they look upon each other; every second of the day and night they are one life ... it is the same one life that belongs to Shakyamuni Buddha. Shakyamuni Buddha is not dead.' This last sentence really struck home, as it resonated with the explanation given by Rev. Master Haryo, of the scripture: "The Immeasurable Life of the Tathagata" read at the festival of Rev. Master Jiyu. Shakyamuni Buddha lives on through each one of his disciples; through each Zen trainee.

As an outcome of the weekend of Festivals at Throssel, I have been given a new appreciation of the meanings of words with which I was already very familiar: 'with the ideal comes the actual like a box with its lid;' 'the koan arises *naturally* in daily life;' 'Shakyamuni Buddha is not dead.'

Marianna Buultjens

Re. Roshi PTNH Jiyu-Kennett (2002) *The Wild, White Goose: the Diary of a Female Zen Priest*. California, Shasta Abbey Press



*Thank you to all the contributors to this issue of the Newsletter.
Deadline for next issue is mid-April 2012.*





- Events elsewhere in Scotland with the Prior -

February 2012

Friday 24th	Aberfeldy group evening	7.30-9pm
Saturday 25th	Dundee group morning	10am-1pm
Sunday 26th	Aberdeen Morning Retreat	10am-1pm

March

Friday 23rd	Aberfeldy group evening	7.30-9pm
Saturday 24th	Dundee group morning	10am-1pm
Sunday 25th	Aberdeen Morning Retreat	10am-1pm

April

Friday 20th	Aberfeldy group evening	7.30-9pm
Saturday 21st	Dundee group morning	10am-1pm
Sunday 22nd	Aberdeen Morning Retreat	10am-1pm

For further details please phone :

Aberdeen –	Bob McGraw or Joyce & Gordon Edward	(01330) 824339 (01467) 681525
Aberfeldy –	Robin Baker	(01887) 820339
Dundee –	Elliott Forsyth	(01333) 451788

— Day-to-day schedule at Portobello Buddhist Priory —

Daily (Every day except Mondays, Thursday afternoons & Sunday p.m.)

MORNING

- 7.00 Meditation
7.40 Morning service

EVENING

- 7.30 Meditation
7.55 Walking meditation
8.00 Meditation
8.30 Evening office

Early morning practice

You can come for early morning meditation, followed by short morning service.

7.00am –
8.15am

Evening practice

Meditation, walking meditation, meditation, evening office.
You are welcome to stay on for tea.

7.30pm –
8.45pm

Introductory afternoons

Are usually held on the second Saturday of each month. A short talk about Buddhist practice and the Serene Reflection Meditation (Soto Zen) tradition. Meditation instruction and discussion.

2.30-4pm

Saturday 14th January, 11th February, 10th March, 14th April

Wednesday and Friday evenings

Midday service and meditation, followed by tea and a Dharma talk /discussion, evening office. 7.30pm–9.30pm

Sunday mornings

Meditation from 9.30am onwards, followed either by a Ceremony, Dharma discussion or Festival at 11am. It is fine to arrive or leave at 10.45am

9.30am–
12.30pm

Festival mornings

Priory open for meditation from 9.30am, or come at 10.45am for the ceremony.

*Portobello Buddhist Priory is Scottish Charity no. SCO31788
Prior: Reverend Favian Straughan*