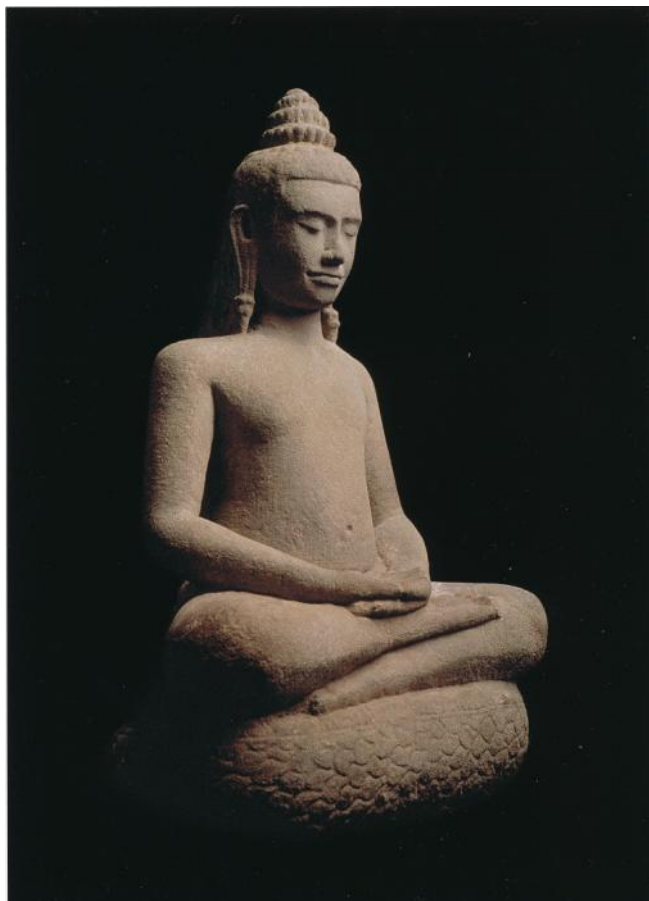


# —*Portobello Buddhist Priory*—



A Temple of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives



*13th century Buddha, Thailand*

## *Newsletter & Calendar of Events* January—April 2020

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## — 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 Master Favian, Prior*

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

## - Weekend events at the Priory -

### January 2020

Sunday 5th	Renewal of Precepts	11am
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### February

Sunday 2nd	Renewal of Precepts	11am
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### March

Sunday 8th	Renewal of Precepts	11am
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### April

Sunday 5th	Festival of Great Master Dogen	11am
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**The Priory is open to visitors** as well as trainees every day from  
6.45am - 9.15pm  
except Mondays, Thursday afternoons, and Sunday pm.

*(Visitors—please phone beforehand, and please note when the Prior  
is holding retreats elsewhere: see inside back page)*

## — *Prior's Notes* —

**O**ur sitting meditation includes the usual back ground white noise of our chattering monkey minds. But at certain times the chattering is accompanied by powerful emotional content, where we are given over to fully identifying with the unfolding drama around some memory, actual or imagined. The experience is that our minds and bodies relive and suffer either a past or imagined future scenario.

In our tradition we have examples of a capacity to remain still in the face of such an onslaught. The figure of Achalanatha (the Immovable One), graphically depicts a being sitting absolutely still in the midst of a hellish inferno. In the story of the Buddha's Enlightenment we have a description of the Army of Mara attacking the Buddha with flaming arrows as he sits in meditation under the Bodhi tree. His capacity to remain still and not panic and run, results in the arrows transforming into lotus flowers and falling harmlessly at his feet. Great Master Dogen in his commentary on our Precepts, expresses the experience of anger, when not identified with as myself, as an energetic movement through the body: "A brilliant sea of clouds, a dignified sea of clouds."

I've found it can be helpful once in a while, to actually bring to mind something I find annoying or embarrassing, or a source of anxiety, any negative thing, and see if it produces negative emotions. And then feel the emotion clearly as a pattern of energy in the body/mind; where is it, what is it? Just feel-

ing it as an object of meditation in a precise way, becoming interested in the physicality of these feelings and watching them change and dissolve.

So in this ‘experiment’ with negative emotion we can discover that there is a place to stand, prior to it, that is not caught up in it. We can simply let it arise and subside. And this is no less true for emotion that comes on us unbidden in direct reaction to something happening in our lives. We can find this place of simply witnessing what’s appearing. So as we go about our day and find ourselves entangled with strong reactions or emotions, can we find even a moment before we’re swept away, and then become interested in the pattern of energy. This is not a way of distancing ourselves from the emotion. In fact it is a willingness to feel even more intensely. To fully experience it. It’s that willingness to give it all of your attention, that cuts through it, because our thoughts about the emotion in this moment are part of the problem, part of the effort to no longer feel what is in-fact arising, whether it’s anger or sadness or fear and then generating a self sense identified with those emotions. By simply being willing to burn up with whatever emotion is appearing, we can experience its real impermanence and know how briefly it lasts.

This is something of the teaching of Achalanatha, the Immovable One, which can reveal the mind of Zazen as being like an open sky, with whatever arises just passing through it when we resolve not to react.



## *The Ability To Die —*

**I** suppose the passage in the **Rules for Meditation** referring to ‘the ability to die whilst sitting and standing’ that is obtained through the power of *zazen* may often seem very mysterious. Why did Dogen use such an expression? I recently watched a video in which Peter Fenwick, a neuro-psychiatrist, discussed near-death experiences. One of the things he said that made a particular impression on me was that when people realize they are dying, they realize they no longer have any of the control they once thought they had, and that they now have to give everything up. But *really* everything: everything they have, everything they are, everything and everyone they love. He says that when people are able to do this, they go into a ‘spiritual domain’ where they have lost their egos, lost their differentiated selves and become ‘non-dual’, and ‘merge with the universe’.

Of course there is a major difference between the actual physical cessation of the organism's functioning and the kind of death of the separate self to which dharma teachings refer. But the metaphor of death is not chosen accidentally, and I think what Fenwick said about the former can shed much light on the meaning of the latter. My sense of how the two may be related was, for me, illustrated by a dream I'd had this spring.

In the dream, I was in a kind of barracks, full of bunks. It was inhabited by jazz greats, and I was among them for some reason. One of the greats, someone like Duke Ellington, was dying. I was too, but I was still able to stand. The great man was breathing his last and was being attended to. Suddenly I felt myself weakening and I knew my time had come too, and I started to approach a bed, afraid that because everyone was busy with such an illustrious pa-

tient, they wouldn't notice me, and I'd just collapse on the floor and go unattended. But they must have tended to me too, because the next thing I knew I was in a bed, and some nurses were getting me ready. Everything in my field of vision looked like it had been just quickly and lightly sketched in pencil by an artist – I could just see some faint outlines of shapes. And somehow my breathing felt like it was getting like that too, and I knew I was breathing my last. The nurses were comforting me, and telling me something like that I should just relax and be of good cheer, because everything was going to be fine (these weren't empty words of comfort, they weren't trying to tell me I wasn't going to die or anything like that; they meant death was going to be fine). And then I said "I love you" and suddenly felt an urge to tell them who those words were meant for, who they should pass them on to. Then I felt a sense of unease that no one was listening any more, and/or

that I didn't have the strength to say the words, but then I realized it didn't matter. It was a kind of sublime indifference that wasn't the same as not caring (i.e. not loving) but a complete relinquishing of the need to try to control anything any more, including what anybody thought about me, and also an awareness that whatever needed to be known **was** known already and maybe always had been, and maybe also that those words actually weren't really meant for anyone in particular but for everyone and everything. And feeling that feeling, I knew that I was gone.

Clearly, living a preceptual life in the world means action, and action requires a separate self. So the 'dying' referred to in the Rules is obviously different from the total relinquishment of the separate self that occurs at the end of the life of our physical body. But just as in the famous Zen Ox-Herding pictures, it is necessary to transcend both Ox and Self before returning to the marketplace, so for

our action in everyday life to come from the awakened state that we sometimes refer to as ‘the mind of meditation’, it is necessary to have sat in that still place and to have

come to know the feeling of letting go of *everything*.

*Rick Woodward*



*'Now, before me, the dead trees  
become alive'*

(Final image of the  
Ox-herding sequence)

## *Listening and learning —*



**H**ere's a little doodle for the newsletter. It's inspired by a story I read from a children's book of Buddhist stories that I borrowed from Rev. Favian. The story is called 'the king's elephant' and shares the moral of keeping good company. In the story the elephant pins back his ears and takes in the messages from the king's best men. Being new to the sangha here in Portobello I have been enjoying doing the same at the dharma evenings, taking it all in - listening and learning from great company.

Thank you,

*Niamh Murphy*



## *Why is my life so busy?*

**T**his has been a perpetual question for me. I have long existed in an expectant state of anticipating when things will be quieter/less hectic/easier. At last it is dawning on me that the resolution to this “too busy” state exists not out there, but in here. It has taken a while for me to get here.

Our culture seems to encourage an approach to life which says “if there is physically time to do something and we want to do it then we should”. It doesn't take long for this approach to create days which are filled with activities and commitments. I include here paid work, unpaid household work, social activities, voluntary work and exercise. I find myself wishing for a time when I will have “more time”. This wish doesn't even really make sense when I think about it?

Training provides several powerful insights. (I experience them as “standing on a rake” moments. Do you remember how, in a Tom and Jerry chase scene, Tom steps on a rake and the handle of the rake pings up

and gets him right between the eyes?)

Firstly, in being fully present with whatever is in hand, the other things on the to-do list fall away meantime. The old maxim of “doing one thing at a time” and really only being with that one thing is much less effortful than planning the next thing on the list whilst doing this thing in front of me.

Secondly, sitting with the busy mind and allowing for it to fizzle out and become quieter shows up some of the activity which is created by the habit of grasping after outcomes. Wanting things to be a certain way, wanting to have certain objects, wanting to be involved in certain activities - all this wanting demands a whole lot of action. If I can see the distinction between the bare necessary stuff which needs doing and the more elaborate stuff which I identify as being “good” and contributing to my “ideal life” I have more choice about what and how much to do.

Thirdly - and this is the biggest rake of the lot thus far - all that busy stuff is what I make sure I've got plenty of in

my life so I don't have too much opportunity for peace and stillness. When I look back at that wish I mentioned earlier for “more time” I wonder if it isn't actually a wish for peace and stillness. How crazy then that I am resisting this by creating a busy life.

Fourthly, there is a flicker of visceral understanding that the creator of this busy life is ‘me’. The ‘me’

that is differentiated from the rest of life. This is where I rest just now. A funny feeling comes with it. Unfamiliar and rather scary. Some felt threat of annihilation if ‘me’ isn't running the show...So resist, resist, resist.

All I know is, keep training.

*Jane Stephen*



## *Segaki 2019*

**A**lthough I have been practising this Buddhist path since 1999 and been a twice yearly visitor to Throssel Hole most years, for some reason I had never made it to the Segaki retreat. This retreat is held each year in October and on reflection it is surprising that I had never attended before. What had put me off I wondered? Perhaps it is because the retreat focuses to some degree on death and moving on from this life. I am not put off discussing the subject of my own mortality but for some reason I just hadn't made it along. However, this year I felt I wanted to attend.

My dog Fudge had died last year at the age of twelve and a half years. A good age for a working Cocker Spaniel. I am married with two children, now aged 21 and 16. The dog had been a huge part of the boys' lives growing up, and his passing affected me more than I maybe wanted to admit to myself. Fudge was a great dog. Obedient and full of life. I walked many a mountain glen with him at my side and I marvelled at how fit he was. Fudge started to slow down when he got close to being twelve and over a period of months he slowly declined. Those long walks where he darted ahead of me soon became slow walks with me darting ahead of him. His back legs started to go and one day I felt he was in so much pain it was unfair to let him go on and the vet agreed.

I will never forget that fateful day when I had to take him to the vet. We were going on holiday and my wife and boys didn't want to see his final moment. We were holidaying in Scotland so they headed off and I said I would follow on later once I had gone the vet. We were all upset that day and said those awful final farewells. Once the family were on their way, I took Fudge to the vet. The vet was fantastic with me. He could see how upset I was, a quivering wreck by this point, but he dealt with me compassionately and skilfully. I held Fudge as the injection was administered and felt the last ebb of life in his body and he slipped away. I will never forget that moment, but I was glad that I was with Fudge right up to the very end.

I am not one for indulging in mystical stories but something strange did happen after he died. My family and I always felt his presence around us. We would occasionally hear him in the house and have the feeling he was with us when we went on walks. This feeling was strong and persistent. Prior to getting Fudge I had not liked dogs very much. On reflection this is quite unusual for me. I love nature, the outdoors and animals but there was just something about dogs I never clicked with. Several years after taking up the practice I would get a strong sense of a dog being present during my meditations. At first, I thought I was just imagining it and presumed it would go away. I was wrong; this strong sense of a dog would appear during meditation for months to come. My wife was shocked but delighted, when I announced one day that we should get a dog. The boys were even more pleased! So, Fudge appeared on the scene and he fitted in right away.

I didn't have a clear idea why I was going to Segaki but I had a very vague notion that I should do it for Fudge. I was aware that there is a ceremony during the week where loved ones recently departed are helped to move on. I just had a feeling that Fudge needed a bit of help.

There was a discussion each day with Reverend Master Leandra. On the first day she encouraged us to think about our own death and what that meant for us and our life of practice. During the discussions people shared very moving stories about family and friends they had lost recently. I wanted to tell my story about Fudge, but it didn't feel appropriate whilst everyone was talking movingly about human death. The next day however I spoke up and just about held it together as I told the story about Fudge and how me and my family missed him so much and just felt he was still around somehow. This seemed to open the flood gates and several moving stories followed from my fellow retreatants about their grief for animals that had died. It was good to know that I wasn't alone in feeling so deeply pained by the passing of an animal.

The ceremony came and I put Fudge's name up on the Altar and could hear the monks reading out his name repeatedly and those of others' loved ones

as the ceremony proceeded. It is a fascinating ceremony and it starts with the blowing of conch shells, yes conch shells, which give out the most incredible sound.



*Throssel Hole*

Cymbals and drums

are beaten and the hungry ghosts and those whose names are read out are invited to the Altar to be fed with the Dharma. The Altar is full of different kinds of food, including dog food, which I thought was very thoughtful of the monks. The windows of the monastery are opened so that the spirits of the dead can enter and see the Altar.

It might sound silly to some, but I could feel Fudge's presence during that ceremony. But neither my family nor I have ever felt his presence since, and we all have a feeling that he has moved on and is wherever he is supposed to be now. Nothing like this has happened to me before or since but I have a strong sense that there was a real karmic connection between me, and that wonderful dog, and the connection needed somehow to be cleansed after his death.

What is the point of telling this story? For me it reminds me to be open to the fact that reality is not always what it seems. Too often I am closed to the possibilities out there and only see through my fixed view of the world. Dogen in the Shobogenzo, in the chapter 'Uji' talks about time being not what we think it is. Time doesn't just move forward, but it also goes forward and backwards and swirls around us. Perhaps there is some connection between the past and the present that I can't explain but due to our deep connections to one another, for instance with me and Fudge, we remain close to people as we meditate and practice. Dogen in 'Uji' says we

are being time and time being. I wonder if this is what I experienced with this ongoing connection to my dog Fudge? I will not get too hung up on this and I realise that I just have to let these things be and practice with them, not placing too much attention on any of it! One thing is for sure though, the passing of Fudge has showed me the deep connection that we all have and are capable of expressing to each other whether human or other.

In gassho

*Thane Lawrie*



*Fudge*

— *Interconnection and Compassion on a trip to London* —



**H**eading south on the train, the movement of the sea, calm, very present like some vast pulsing being, flickering with blue and grey. Changing colours subtly enabled by wind and light.

On the train, in the adjacent seats, a young mother and baby sit opposite an older woman, their companion, a nanny. It seems an unusual occurrence in this day and age.

The baby, so young, face still a little puckered up, is mostly content, passed from mother to nurse and nurse to mother, comforted, soothed, admired, fed at the breast and winded. The mother receives approving glances and smiles from the nanny. One man in particular is uncomfortable with this natural intimacy and turns away.

But it is good to be in this baby's company on our journey south. His presence seems so beneficent.

We pass the islands off the coast of Northumberland and I become more aware of the landscape – trees and fields – golden browns in the low light, the hazy blue boundlessness of sky.

Trees silhouetted with their remaining leaves touched by the sun and turned to gold.

The baby wakes up from slumber, wriggles and gives one of those first beaming baby smiles. It seems full of joy and contentment.

We are escaping village life and work in the gardens for a while, having a pause.

Already I realize that we are not yet

attuned, we come from a quieter world with few people, caught up in nature under big skies, amongst trees, plants and wildlife and on this journey we are pulled into a much more populated world.

We are not used to the crowds and bustle – the full force of humanity hits us at King's Cross and the full force of brick, steel, concrete, glass and traffic. Pavements seem hard under our feet after so much time on grass and soil.

So much human movement, so many faces, so many people from all over the world.

As we walk down to Russell Square, as face follows face coming towards me, I am hit with a realization – a deep fellow feeling – we are ever-expanding, budding, fruiting, all budding, growing changing within an expanding flow. All just moving growing and subsiding parts of universal expansion...just small parts of 'this' as it unfolds and moves on. There is love.

Norman Fischer once signed a book for me – *Magnolias All At Once*, a text collaging Lesley Shapiro's works with a version of Eihei Dogen's *Uji* –

Bud, Bud, Bud, Bud Bud... this has often served as a Koan for me. It seems to fit the life I am living.

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In the square I am pleased to see the great Plane trees, their wonderful trunks, gnarled and towering, their flaking bark changing colours in the light. They are so organic, so stilly alive in this geometric man made a square. They seem to be kin, but then so are the buildings, the people, the pavements, the grass, the birds.

The next day, we meet our niece for lunch at Tate Modern. My wife has treated us to lunch and we eat a Menu devised by chefs from Olafur Eliasson's collaborative and creative communal studio space in Berlin – all is vegetarian, sustainably sourced and organic...so much attention to detail, so much care taken to make us comfortable and make this an interesting experience – and again I am filled with thoughts of all this interconnection, collaboration the infinite number of actions and events that have happened in order for this to occur.

Olafur Eliasson is not someone I had come across before...but I am pleased to discover that he is an in-



ventive artist and sculptor who not only works with constructions but is so keen on collaboration and interconnection and has done great work involving refugees and educating and illustrating the perils of climate change. Towards the end of the exhibition is an example of an 'Ideas wall', such as they would have in Berlin, and my eye is drawn to the word COMPASSION written in bold felt tip, from it are lines linking to the text of an interview between Eliasson and Professor Tania Singer who has been studying and in-

vestigating social neuroscience in London. They discuss her investigations into how the reality of others comes across in your brain, how we share the suffering of others.. how compassion is rooted in a feeling of unconditional love and concern for others. In this I am thrown back to a talk at Jukai by Reverend Master Daishin Morgan in which, I think, he was talking about zazen and that with deep and continued meditation you might find unconditional love. My recent experiences of meditation have allowed me to taste



this...The interview is interesting and absorbing and I am so pleased to have found it there, pinned on the wall. I realize that I tend to be quite absorbed these days with meditation, love and compassion, with interconnection and impermanence and that it is not hard to find instances of the many other folk with similar pre-occupations!

Connectedness, compassion, empathy, collaboration, being part of a whole, Buddha recognizing Buddha.

The next day we take a bus from the National Gallery up to Holborn. The journey is slow and I find myself watching the rhythms of feet as people walk the pavements. The shifts from heel to toe, the marvel of movement, how all this comes together. It is rhythmic and even, at times, balletic. How different footwear effects the footstep, how heavy boots seem to make for a more flat footed action, how trainers seem to offer more of a spring, how feet avoid each other. How the crowds of people move in some sort of shared dance, yet most people are probably unaware of this dance, absorbed in thought, or tuned in to music on headphones. It is remarkable how adjustments are made to avoid collisions. Motion, awareness,

collaboration – beauty.

Walking happens, each step is not thought through. It is nature in action in this particular place and time.

The last morning we visit a Kaethe Koellwitz exhibition in the drawing rooms of the British Museum. Some beautiful examples of her etchings, drawings and prints. Enfolding, embracing, protection, mourning. Stark images of starvation, illness and death. Figures of working women drawn with amazing beauty. Experimental lithographs – I wonder at the dedication and process. She knew what she was about.

The compassion of her art, the compassion she depicts in the face of such suffering. The skill of her work and her life long commitment. She was intimately connected to what was going on around her, she was attuned. She has long been a heroine of mine, a Bodhisattva perhaps. Fully engaged in being with suffering and in offering support. I'm so pleased to have had the opportunity, by chance, to see some of her work again. Thank you Kaethe, thank you.

Sometimes in the city, away from the

parks and squares, we seem to be the only living beings present...we are, we are being, we are present moment after moment but ever changing, ever moving, ever shifting, everflowing – collaborating and interpenetrating whether we know it or not. Seeding, rooting, growing, budding, flowering, fruiting, withering, dying, falling apart and beginning again. Entropy.

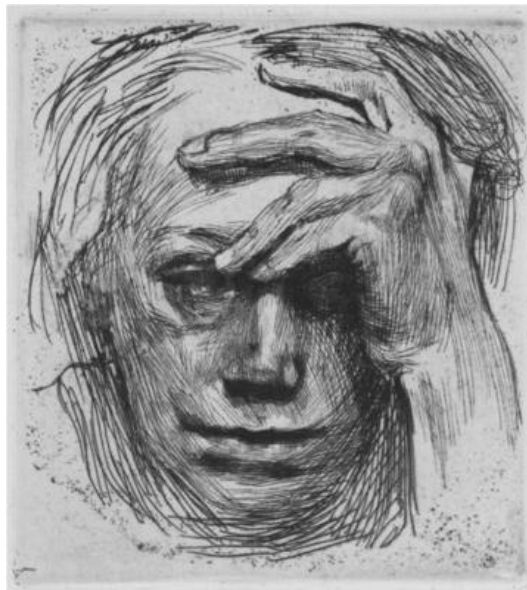
I'll be long gone, part of other becom-

ings. The baby on the train is on a similar journey. The smile...the smile knows. The smile brings a smile.

Bud, bud, bud, bud, bud – I often thought I should add 'dha' to the final bud.

Going, going, going on and always going on, always becoming Buddha.

*Jerry Simcock*



*Image by Kaethe Kollwitz*

## *The bucket always has a bottom —*

**T**he Sufi tradition has many stories of Mullah Nasruddin, a legendary wise fool. The story of the bucket is an example:

*One day, a student of Nasruddin went to visit him at his home. Already expecting some crazy behaviour on Mullah's part, he steeled himself not to react. Another spiritual teacher once advised him; "If you react unconsciously, you push the lesson of the moment away."*

*When Mullah opened the door, he was overjoyed to see his student. "My friend! Just in time - - you can help me draw water from the well! Here, take this bucket and follow me!"*

*The student followed Mullah to the well and watched while he began to pull water from the well and splash it into the bucket the student was holding. "No problem," he thought to himself.*

*After a few moments, he began to notice that the level of the water in the bucket was not rising very quickly. Where was all the water going? Then he chanced to look underneath the bucket. It was leaking almost as much as Mullah put in each time. This went on for a while, and then, finally, the student couldn't take any more and cried out in exasperation:*

*"Mullah, you idiot! Can't you see that the bucket is leaking!"*

*"My friend," Mullah replied, "I was only looking at the top of the bucket. What does the bottom have to do with it?"*

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A commentary on this story points out that, as frequently happens in Sufi stories, Mullah Nasruddin acts out and exaggerates a certain habit of mind in which many of us engage. We are so busy looking at how much we're getting right now that we don't notice how we've used what we've already received. In such a frame of mind, more is never enough – whether it's love, knowledge; or wealth – because our bucket has no bottom.

This story put me in mind of another, from our own tradition, in the first chapter of a book **'Buddhism from Within'** written by a previous Head of our Order, RM Daizui,. He says he once heard a country and western song called 'Faster Horses.'

*'It was one of those partly humorous, partly philosophical songs about the meaning of life. An idealistic young man meets an old cowboy sitting in a bar, his face weather-beaten, his hands gnarled; the youngster just knows that this guy has the secret to life. So he asks him all sorts of deep questions about what makes life worth living, and no matter what the young man asks, the old timer comes back with the same answer, "Faster horses; younger women; older whiskey; more money!" Well, I thought, that may not say much about the true meaning of life, but it sure does sum up the problem of human existence: we're never satisfied.*

*If we don't have it, we want some; if we have some, we want more; if we have lots, we're afraid of losing it. Now, the 'it' can be anything, but mostly the song had it right: it's either 'faster horses' (power, excitement, fame, things which others envy), 'younger women' (which works in the song but strikes me as being a little one-sided—it could just as easily be 'wilder guys'), 'older whiskey' (better sensual experiences of all sorts, and especially ones that make us forget our problems), or, of course, 'more money.' This business of never being satisfied may not seem like all that big a problem, but it goes right to the heart of some of the most difficult things in life. If we're never satisfied, it guarantees that we can never really be completely at peace within ourselves and also that we never get a chance to fully enjoy the simple pleasures that actually do make life worthwhile. How can you be fully present, watching a sunset beside your partner, when half of you is itching to be with someone else, wishing you had your camera, or thinking about how to beat the competition at work? How can you fully enjoy the satisfaction of a job well done when part of you knows that you succeeded at the expense of someone else or have made a product that doesn't really help anybody? Sure, there is pleasure in a new car, a wild romance, a great new piece of music, a promotion; but how long*

*does it last? And are those the things that actually stand out as having given life meaning, when you look back over your life?*

*By never being satisfied, it seems that we are destined to rob ourselves of the very things we value most: a peaceful heart, true and lasting love, real friendship, the satisfaction of doing something worthwhile in this world. Instead, we seem to propel ourselves in exactly the opposite direction: into fear, anger, worry, and discontent. Why do we do this to ourselves? How did we get into this mess?’*

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As I was mulling this over, it suddenly occurred to me that I had just today sent a slightly anxious email to RM Favian, asking whether he had heard of any further contributions likely to be coming for our newsletter.

The anxiety arises from the fact that, as editor, I’m conscious that at time of writing this, there is only one article and two pieces of artwork which have been contributed; and there’s just a couple of weeks before I will be putting the newsletter together and circulating it before the turn of the year. (It includes a calendar of events for Portobello Priory, and wider afield in Scotland – so there is a time-sensitivity.)

The operative word is ‘only’. That’s what the anxiety is about; and I realise that the same anxiety usually arises with each edition – will there be ‘enough’? Will it be ‘good enough’? There’s a sense of embarrassment as I examine my implicit assumptions, because I realise I too am busily watching the top of the bucket without examining the state of the bottom.

The fact of the matter is that it really doesn’t matter how much or how little is contributed. If the newsletter is in effect news of training in our sangha, then what sangha members feel moved to contribute about some aspect of training, is the newsletter. Exactly that, no more and no less, one contribution or a dozen. The bucket is always full in that sense. And yet how easy it is – especially when having a role, in this case as editor – to allow old habits to attach themselves to that role, and to allow the ‘faster horses’ tendency to creep in.

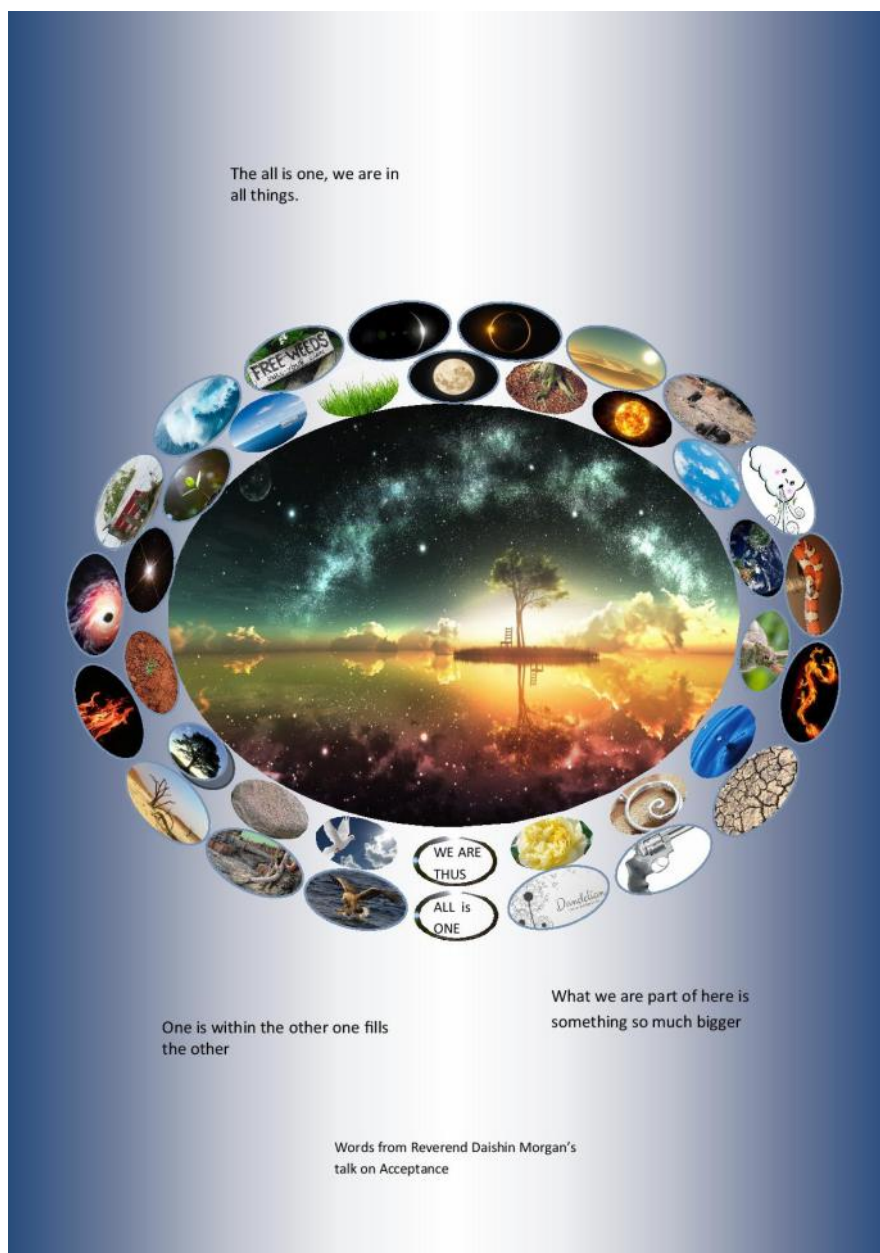
What also occurs to me is a sense of gratitude, in this case to another spiritual tradition which arrives at the same teaching as our own but using a different story and perspective which, in the form of the 'bucket' theme, seemed to be what was required to nudge my elbow!

*Willie Grieve*



*Bucket 3, Zhang Enli, 2007 (Tate)*

*Reflections on Acceptance —*



— *with thanks to Sheila Anderson for this contribution*



## ***SILENT ILLUMINATION***

*By Chan Master Hongzhi Zhengjue*

**S**ilently and serenely, one forgets all words,  
Clearly and vividly, it appears before you.  
When one realizes it, time has no limits.  
When experienced, your surroundings come to life.

Singularly illuminating is this bright awareness,  
Full of wonder is the pure illumination.  
The moon's appearance, a river of stars,  
Snow-clad pines, clouds hovering on mountain peaks.

In darkness, they glow with brightness.  
In shadows, they shine with a splendid light.  
Like the dreaming of a crane flying in empty space,  
Like the clear, still water of an autumn pool,

Endless eons dissolve into nothingness,  
Each indistinguishable from the other.  
In this illumination all striving is forgotten.  
Where does this wonder exist?

Brightness and clarity dispel confusion  
On the path of Silent Illumination,  
The origin of the infinitesimal.  
To penetrate the extremely small,  
There is the gold shuttle on a loom of jade.

Subject and object influence each other.  
Light and darkness are mutually dependent.  
There is neither mind nor world to rely on,  
Yet do the two interact, mutually.

Drink the medicine of correct views.  
Beat the poison-smeared drum.  
When silence and illumination are complete  
Killing and bringing to life are choices I make.

At last, through the door, one emerges.  
The fruit has ripened on the branch.  
Only this Silence is the ultimate teaching.  
Only this Illumination, the universal response.  
The response is without effort.

The teaching, not heard with the ears.  
Throughout the universe, all things  
Emit light and speak the Dharma.  
They testify to each other,  
Answering each other's questions:  
Mutually answering and testifying,  
Responding in perfect harmony.

When illumination is without serenity,  
Then will distinctions be seen:  
Mutually testifying and answering,  
Giving rise to disharmony.

If within serenity illumination is lost,  
All will become wasteful and secondary.  
When Silent Illumination is complete,  
The lotus will blossom, the dreamer will awaken.

The hundred rivers flow to the ocean,  
The thousand mountains face the loftiest peak.

Like the goose preferring milk to water,  
Like a busy bee gathering pollen,  
When Silent Illumination reaches the ultimate,  
I carry on the original tradition of my sect.

This practice is called Silent Illumination.  
It penetrates from the deepest to the highest.

Translation from *Getting the Buddha Mind*,  
Chan Master Sheng Yen, North Atlantic Books, 2005.

*With thanks to Christele Geuffroy for contributing this poem —*



## *Favourites*

**I**n 'The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie' by Muriel Spark, the eponymous heroine asks her class;  
"Girls, who is the greatest Italian painter?"  
One of the girls confidently answers;  
"Leonardo da Vinci, Miss." "That is incorrect!" the imperious Miss Jean Brodie replies; "The answer is Giotto; he is my favourite!"

I wonder if we are allowed to have favourites when it comes to Dharma talks. If we are, my favourite is Rev. Master Scholastica Hicks. I always look on Monday to see who gave the Dharma talk at Shasta Abbey on Sunday. I try to listen to them all, but it is always a great pleasure to see that Rev. Master Scholastica has given a Dharma talk. She has such a lovely, warm, soft voice and a lovely accent.

Like all of the teachers she covers a range of different subjects. Always finding a teaching in everything. One memorable talk is about her time staying at the abbey hermitage in a solitary retreat. She tells us she got up in the middle of the night, in the pitch dark, and fell and broke her wrist. Lying there, cold and helpless, she still managed to find acceptance in what has happened to her.

She always begins her talks by thanking Rev. Master Meian for inviting her to give the Dharma talk. And always remembers to thank Rev. Master Jiyu, for her being here, saying that without her there would be no 'here' to be 'here'. Which is true for all of us.

She tells in another Dharma talk of nursing Rev. Master Jiyu in her final illness, her voice cracking with emotion when she speaks of her beloved master.

In another talk she tells us about giving up all her jazz records when she entered the abbey. It made me wonder who her favourites were. Was it Bird or Dizzy or Miles or Monk or Trane or Mingus or Brubeck? I bet her favourite record was "Kind of Blue". It's every jazz lovers favourite.

She is just so human and so full of gratitude at all times. I would like to express my gratitude to her for the wonderful Dharma talks.

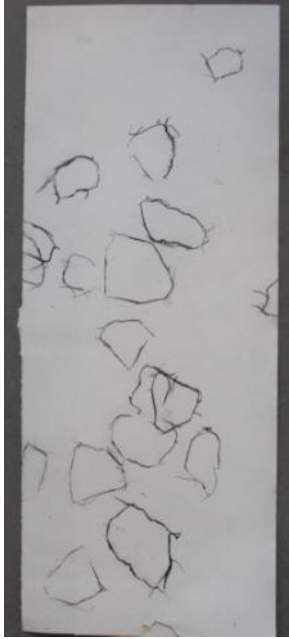
In gassho,

*David Pentony*



*Rev Master Scholastica*

## Acceptance



A few months ago I created a series of drawings inspired by the creative techniques of Artist and Zen practitioner John Cage (*Where R=Ryōanji*), here the artist must surrender to ‘chance’, simply rolling stones or pebbles onto paper and, with a pencil, recording where they have landed by drawing around their circumference. Once repeated many times one is left with an array of stone like forms (see image). Here I find a subtle dharmic beauty, the beauty of acceptance to whatever happens, a kind of surrender to the way of things that allows for an understanding of beauty as being now, nirvana as being how it already is.

I hope these drawings can be understood in a wider context; to me, each and every stone represents one of us, the universe has thrown us into the situation we are within and now we are faced with a choice, the desire of something different or acceptance of the vast beauty of it all, just how it is! This felt particularly poignant, having just moved to Edinburgh to study I became overwhelmed within my new context, I desired so much from it and pushed so much away. Only when taking a step back (in the sense of meditation) am I able to view my life with a wider context, here a lightness of being becomes tangible and the beauty of life as it is becomes just a little bit clearer. To me, these drawings say something about acceptance.

*‘if you can understand that birth and death are Nirvana itself, there is not only no necessity to avoid them but also nothing to search for that is called Nirvana.’ - Dogan (‘Shushogi’)*

Lucas Priest



*Thank you to all the contributors to this issue of the Newsletter.  
Deadline for next issue is mid-April 2020*





## **- Events elsewhere in Scotland with the Prior -**

### **February 2020**

Friday 28th	Aberfeldy evening retreat	7.30—9.00pm
Saturday 29th	Dundee morning retreat	10am-1pm
Sunday 1st March	Aberdeen morning retreat	10am-1pm

### **March**

Friday 27th	Aberfeldy evening retreat	7.30-9pm
Saturday 28th	Dundee morning retreat	10am-1pm
Sunday 29th	Aberdeen morning retreat	10am-1pm

### **April**

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

### ***For further details please phone :***

<b>Aberdeen -</b>	Eddie Shields	(01224) 861732
	or Joyce & Gordon Edward	(or mobile 07870 140427) (01467) 681525
<b>Aberfeldy -</b>	Robin Baker	(01887) 820339
<b>Dundee -</b>	Liz Evans	(01337) 870402
		(or mobile 07763 188461)
<b>Highland -</b>	Ann Milston	(01309) 690196 or <a href="mailto:marge2milly@gmail.com">marge2milly@gmail.com</a>

## — 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 (but not always—please check dates below) held on the second Saturday of each month. A short talk will be given about Buddhist practice and the Serene Reflection Meditation (Soto Zen) tradition, with meditation instruction and discussion.

**Saturday 4th January, Saturday 1st February,  
Saturday 7th March, Saturday 4th April**

2.30-4pm

### **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 Master Favian Straughan*