

—Portobello Buddhist Priory—



A Temple of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives



*Primrose sheltering from the gales:
Spring in the Orkneys*

Calendar of Events

May to August 2007

Portobello Buddhist Priory
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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 Favian, Prior

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

- Weekend events at the Priory -

May 2007

Sunday 6th	Festival of the Buddha's birth	11am
Sunday 20th	Renewal of Precepts	11am

June

Sunday 3rd	Festival of Great Master Dogen	11am
Sunday 17th	Renewal of Precepts	11am

July

Sunday 1st	Festival of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva	11am
Sunday 22nd	Renewal of Precepts	11am

August

Sunday 5th	Festival of Avalokiteshwara Bodhisattva	11am
Sunday 26th	Renewal of Precepts	11am

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

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

— *Prior's Notes* —

I remember hearing about some 1930's poets in Paris who sat down to make a manifesto for their group and top of the list was their intention to commit to paper only that which they knew to be true for themselves.

The result of this was that they would sit in their favourite coffee shop for hours and emerge with only a few words, a phrase or a line of poetry but also with the deep conviction that they had done something wholly worthwhile. My response on hearing this was a certain recognition of the intention to learn to truly pay attention to the depths of ourselves and the cultivation of awareness that sees through the easy conditioned 'truths' the mind has learnt to throw out in response to our living.

This memory has stayed with me I think also for what it says about the need for commitment to the spirit of enquiry which our tradition shares. When we meditate there needs to be the basic willingness to sit in open welcoming awareness to whatever this moment offers, entrusting ourselves as completely as we can to 'just this sitting'. But what we find in this is a need to engage that keeps the sitting vital and focused especially when we seem to be running out of steam and coasting in the fog. It is this enquiring spirit that the coffee shop poets remind me of.

The engagement is about attention, perhaps following the course of a leading question, such as 'what is this' into the depth of the sitting. Or it may come as an invitation to that which is felt to be just under the surface of the mind's awareness but experienced

Inside this issue-

<i>Environmental thoughts— and two poems</i>	2
<i>Naming Ceremony—</i>	3
<i>Travelling & practice (1)</i>	4
<i>Travelling & practice (2)</i>	5
<i>Nature & Buddha Nature</i>	6

as an obscure pressure against it. This is not simply about engaging the analytic faculties, getting busy in our heads, conceptualising what we are. Rather it's this sense of not settling for anything less than the truth of this moment. The enquiry calls for a real integrity and a capacity to fine tune our attention coupled to a continuing letting go, so the question-following is a genuine feeling into and a direct contact with 'what is this' as the whole of our being. This is real work and like the poets we may seem to have little to show for the endeavour after a couple of sittings and yet something in us also knows the endeavour is wholly worthwhile.

Environmental thoughts -

To live lightly on the earth is an integral part of spiritual practice. In my experience it is rare to find a spiritually attentive person for whom this is untrue, whether they are aware of it or not. For many people, a 'green' lifestyle becomes a form of practice and, as with other paths, results in heightened self-awareness. Indeed there is a point where it becomes difficult, and even damaging, to care deeply about the earth and *not* have a spiritual practice.

But what do I mean when I say 'living lightly' on the earth? Indigenous cultures directly see their impacts on the earth, and are therefore inclined to live in a form of balance with their surroundings. Our lives are not so, and our vision is obscured by the many processes between us and the products that we eat and use. For example, biscuits are often made with palm oil, which is shipped from Indonesia after being grown

on immense plantations where pristine rain-forest once stood. If you had to cut down the forest with your own hands, would you feel differently about digestives?

The joy in Zen for someone like me is that it is traditionally aligned with modern environmental ethics; living simply, taking care of all living things, resisting exploitation, stealing and social injustice. The extent to which we follow these can be measured by our 'environmental impact'. In practice terms, being environmentally conscious is exercised through mindfulness. To be aware of the origin and impact of everything that we make part of our existence is to be truly mindful.

Rachael Dunsmore

Poems discovered in getting to know Buddhism

'Doing nothing,
sitting in silence,
spring comes,
and the grass grows by itself.'

'The birds vanish into the sky,
the clouds drift away,
we sit together,
the mountain and I,
until only the mountain remains.'

- with thanks to Thomas

Naming Ceremony for Luke Shala Westmoreland

When Enita and I first saw Luke he was an eight-cell embryo on a bright green computer screen in the embryology lab of the Edinburgh Assisted Reproduction Unit at the Royal Infirmary. This was just before that sacred moment when he was gently placed into the womb. It is nothing short of amazing how life, all life, can grow from such microscopic and humble beginnings. Now, about 10 months later, we are blessed with Luke, a healthy, lively, bundle of baby all of 4 weeks old. It was in gratitude to this small miracle that we celebrated Luke being with us in this life; to express our willingness to train with him and to be responsible for providing an environment of compassion, love and wisdom in which he can grow and express his intrinsic Buddha Nature.

Tim Westmoreland



Travelling and practice (1) — togetherness and separateness

In November I set out on a 3 month journey by private bus around South America through Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Chile, Argentina and Brazil, taking in many of the famous sights and treks en route and ending with the carnival in Rio. There were about 20 in the group, all individuals apart from one couple, and accommodation involved a mixture of camping and hotels. Because of travel problems from Miami to Quito, the rest of the group had already been together for a couple of days before I finally caught up with them at Riobamba in Ecuador. Although I felt that I was bound to enjoy the trip I did rather wonder how a group of 20 strangers, covering a wide range of ages and personalities, would get on when thrown into such close proximity for 3 months.

After a short settling in period most people seemed to drift naturally into their own little friendships based on some mysterious combination of personalities, interests, age, sex, circumstances and anything else that comes into these things, although there were always a whole series of other relationships and interactions which criss-crossed these. We had heard that problems had risen in some of the previous trips but, fortunately, our group generally got on very well. In fact, I only observed two angry incidents on the whole trip – one directed at a very conscientious vegetarian who seemed to subject waiters and ice-cream girls to the Spanish inquisition concerning the origin of every minute ingredient, and the other the result of two colliding egos on a cook team neither of whom would let go. There were also some occasions where, although there was no open venting of anger, one could see that someone's behaviour was causing irritation but this could often be easily sorted out with a few

friendly words or, as in a couple of cases, the offending behaviour eventually became accepted as a quaint, even amusing, personality trait rather than a reason for anger. One situation which threatened to cause some discontent in the ranks was on the first morning of the Inca Trail when the head guide was trying to keep us all reasonably together despite the fact that some people are uncomfortable at too slow a pace while others like to go slowly or to take lots and lots of photographs. Fortunately, after lunch and thereafter, everyone was allowed to go on at their own pace – in fact, almost all the walking on the trip was done on this basis which suited everyone.

It certainly helped that we had an excellent trip leader, an Argentinian with excellent English, who made sure that all the background organisation ran smoothly, handled the several truck breakdowns really well and who was very good at involving everyone in obtaining a consensus when opposing courses of action were being proposed. There was also a great willingness to help when there was work to be done and, even though there was always a cook team on duty, everyone pitched in to help them or at least as many as could without spoiling the broth – so there was hardly ever any feeling of resentment about people not pulling their weight.

I think another reason why few problems arose was that, even on a trip such as this, there is no need to be constantly interacting with others. On the long bus journeys there were usually ample opportunities to disappear into reading, music, puzzles, simply looking out the window, sleeping or whatever. When not actually travelling we generally had a lot of choice of which activities we would take part

in or, as I did on a couple of occasions, to actually leave the trip for a few days to indulge in some separate activity. When camping or particularly in town, one could head off on one's own or with selected members of the group with whom one possibly had more in common, although it was of course important to try to ensure that no-one felt excluded. On treks, it was fairly normal to spend some part of the time walking by ones self, going at one's own pace and letting thoughts flow freely. If the above sounds as if we spent all the time avoiding each other, then I should say that that was not the case at all. But it was a great help to have some quiet time for oneself as well as to get the chance to do something which did not involve a party of 20 – it probably acted as a safety valve to prevent the potential build up of friction. I personally found that on the trip I sat in formal meditation much less than normal but that my “informal” meditation and awareness remained as important to me as ever.

Another key reason why I think people got on so well was the sharing of great experiences. For myself, these included two events which were not even part of the advertised trip: a few of us left the group for 3 days to climb a 6000 metre mountain near La Paz in Bolivia which,

because of the very high altitude and some very steep snow slopes (tricky for us non-climbers) was a huge effort and gave immense satisfaction. This final climb, together with the few days leading up to it under the guidance and hospitality of the wonderful Bolivian guides, created a huge bond in our small sub-group. Another great experience, this time of the whole group, was one night at a bush camp in Patagonia when we saw the McNaught comet brilliantly in the sky, the great ball of fire and the huge tail, visible for ages. Out in the middle of nowhere, under perfect conditions, the sight was really awesome and had a powerful effect on everyone. These and the many other wonderful experiences on the trip helped, I think, to make people rise above any minor differences which they had.

It would be misleading to suggest that we all finished the trip as bosom buddies but, on the other hand, it is heartening to think that 20 complete strangers can co-exist in such close proximity relatively harmoniously for such a long time.

John Preston

Travelling and practice (2) — resignation and acceptance

Recently, whilst on holiday in Thailand, I discovered a few things about myself and the way I like to travel.

Usually I travel alone with a tent on my back. This time I was living in a house with my friend and his family of six. I discovered that I am quite proud of my independence and this caused problems for a while. Being grateful for my food and lodgings I felt an obligation to do whatever the family had planned for me, while battling with my strong urge to be on my own traveling and exploring the area.

After a while I decided to accept that my holiday was not my own. Whilst this relieved the frus-

(Continued on page 6)

(Continued from page 5)

tration I soon became apathetic, letting myself be carried along by the current of events.

Eventually, I remembered a line from one of Rev Master Jiyu's talks; "- - *all-acceptance, not resignation. There is a difference.*" I was resigned to my situation. I was not truly accepting it.

Now I'm not saying that I then suddenly turned to an attitude of all-acceptance but in just realising that there was a difference, and that I was suffering from resignation, my attitude started to improve. My apathy and despondency lessened. The will to do things and make decisions gradually returned with a genuine appreciation for all that my hosts had done for me. My mind felt clearer and I felt that I could choose to be part of the flow.

As I say, it is something that needs practice though. Resignation seemed easier but learning to be aware of that unskillful state of mind brought relief. The more I observed my reactions to things, the more I understood how big the difference between acceptance and resignation is. Resignation seems to bring a dull, inactive state of mind whereas true acceptance seems to bring clarity and room for action.

I will still prefer to travel alone but in future if the situation arises where I cannot and I notice a feeling of resignation creeping in, I believe that my awareness of it will lead me to true acceptance of the moment which in turn will stop me spoiling my holiday.

Shuie

Nature & Buddha Nature

[An abbreviated version of a talk given to a Christian discussion group by Rawdon Goodier in November 2006]

Dwelling within Being.

Do we dwell within Being as if within a hostile territory? It would appear that this is not an uncommon perspective and, looking around the world today, one can see many understandable reasons for this. However it seems that this is not a perspective that many of the world faiths would promote or accept. Perhaps some of this pessimistic viewpoint derives from a particular interpretation of the Darwinian inheritance – the apparent purposeless or lack of a teleology of nature (or of existence as a whole) together with the widespread violence found within it. It is interesting to recall Darwin's own response to this. In some of his moods Darwin found

himself repelled by what he saw as the "clumsy, wasteful, blundering, low and horribly cruel works of nature" However, having characterised the evolutionary process in this way and fully acknowledging the amount of suffering in the world, he nevertheless concluded that "according to my judgement happiness decidedly prevails, although this would be very difficult to prove". He argued for this on the rational grounds of natural selection but adds "... several considerations, moreover, lead to the belief that all sentient beings have been formed so as to enjoy, as a general rule, happiness". The cynic might respond that this is an excusable example of Darwin's own good heartedness and sentimentality – but Darwin's view on this matter seems to correspond to a fundamental religious intuition, shared by

many faiths, which may be expressed as the essential goodness of Being.

Present day scientists and agnostics generally decline to attribute purpose to the manifestation of existence or the developing universe. Neither is it usual to find Buddhists expressing themselves in terms of ultimate purposes in the sense of a Creator's plan for the world. Can the development of existence be seen in terms of the exploration of possibilities rather than the unfolding of a prescription? Can a bridge be built between these two perspectives?

Imminent Becoming

How does the process of Being/Becoming manifest in our experience? On first **thought** we tend to **think** of **thoughts** and **ideas** **about** being but if reminded we are generally prepared to admit that feelings are also a vital component. This is not the place to analyse the complex relation between thought and feeling. It seems that sometimes our immediate experience is dominated by the one, sometimes by the other, with the sense of balance or integration between the two rarely attained. Bringing about the balance of body and mind, or at least improving their integration is a role of meditation in Buddhist practice and seems to be that aspect of the practice which receives most attention in the west, perhaps because of the stressful character of contemporary life.

It may seem a little strange that I have not mentioned meditation before in this presentation – after all it was the way that Shakyamuni Buddha established his relation to existence and the Buddhist tradition to which I belong places it at the core of practice.

One helpful way of considering meditation is as the permitting of mental and physical “space” within our daily lives to counter the habit in many of us of trying to keep this space continually filled with work or distractions.

What is it we wish to be distracted from? In living in this way we can easily let the “becoming” of our lives, or perhaps we should say the becoming of our being pass us by unrecognised. We seek to let this meditational space remain unencumbered – not an easy thing! We don't make/create this space but we are sure good at cluttering it up! Generally we have had years of practice at the latter!

It is interesting that we quite often use the metaphor of “space” when talking about meditation. We may be advised to “note the space or emptiness within which all this happens” and this is not the emptiness of non-being but of fullness – the “Great Emptiness” that gives rise to “Wondrous Being”.

The insights that meditation can provide may be painful but can also, indeed at the same time, provoke a deep sense of gratitude. Gratitude to whom and for what you might ask? Is this a good question – or one “not tending towards edification”? Certainly the insights received are not something won by one's own efforts for then gratitude would not be an appropriate response. Effort is needed but it is the effort of the letting go of obstacles rather than the grasping of results. Perhaps the insights may be thought of as the result of a “grace/compassion” that is an intrinsic quality of the flow of becoming in the sense that it is some vision or experience of the quality of this flow which grounds our faith.

Here we are verging on the question of Buddhists' attitudes to the concept of God. In his introductory talk Frank Whaling stated that Buddhists do not believe in God. This needs some qualification. Most Buddhists **have faith in** an ultimate reality and the Buddha himself, in a well known passage in the Udana Sutra, emphasized that “*there exists that which is unborn, that which is unbecoming, that which is uncreated, that which is unconditioned.*” Contemporary Buddhist philosophers are sometimes quite happy to use

the word God to designate this unconditioned, realising of course that this is not the same as when the term is used within the theocentric religions.

Looking at the World Today

If I had been giving this talk a few years ago I would probably have drawn examples from my professional work in the field of nature conservation – describing the conflicts and ambiguities arising out of work on the impacts of various land uses and industries on nature conservation, environmental impact studies, arguments on the methods of conserving Scotland's old pinewoods, etc – how can a Buddhist, observing the precept of not taking life, support culling of red deer to permit forest regeneration? etc. However in the little time I have left for this talk I want to focus on the ecological challenge facing humanity at the present time – the consequences of global warming. The very serious nature of this is now becoming more widely known among the general public though it belongs to a class of problems, recognised by ecologists for several decades now, associated with man's unwillingness to recognise the inability of the world and its ecological processes to sustain his seemingly insatiable demands. This understanding has had to make headway against those, generally industrialists, economists and politicians, who noisily maintained that there were no "limits to growth".

I will not pretend that Buddhists have any unique remedy to offer to this problem

(though you may recall that quite a few years ago the Christian economist Fritz Schumacher suggested the need for a "Buddhist economics" – "in which people mattered"). Certainly Buddhists would not anticipate salvation by supernatural intervention to allow us escape the consequences of our actions. In saying this I am not attributing blame, perhaps it was necessary for humans to test the "limits to their growth" – but the human causes leading to the present circumstances are now plain for all to see.

The second question I offer is: What role might faith communities fulfil in confronting the suffering which is to come? Perhaps I should refine this question by asking what virtues need to be practiced to prevent or ameliorate the hardships which the environmental crisis will bring? I suspect that the answers to this can already be found within our respective traditions – but so far we have avoided looking for them with sufficient urgency. In the Buddhist context one thinks of our first pure precept – cease from evil – we need to stop doing the things which cause suffering in other beings, and be prepared to look at this very closely in the context of the present situation – do unnecessary car or plane journeys constitute an evil? Or perhaps we should cultivate more urgently the virtue of giving – being prepared to make real sacrifices of our so-called standard of living that others may live? To be prepared to work towards a society in which the priority is the meeting of needs rather than the catering for all desires.



*Thank you to all the contributors to this issue of the Newsletter.
Deadline for next issue is the end of July 2007.*





- Events elsewhere in Scotland with the Prior -

May 2007

Friday 25th	Aberfeldy group evening	7.30-9pm
Saturday 26th	Dundee group morning	10am-1pm
Sunday 27th	Aberdeen Day Retreat	10am-4pm
Monday 28th	Aberdeen group evening	6.30-9pm

June

Friday 22nd	Aberfeldy group evening	7.30-9pm
Saturday 23rd	Dundee group morning	10am-1pm
Sunday 24th	Aberdeen Day Retreat	10am-4pm
Monday 25th	Aberdeen group evening	6.30-9pm

July

Friday 13th	Aberfeldy group evening	7.30-9pm
Saturday 14th	Dundee group morning	10am-1pm
Sunday 15th	Aberdeen Day Retreat	10am-4pm
Monday 16th	Aberdeen group evening	6.30-9pm

For further details please phone :

Aberdeen -	Bob McGraw	(01330) 824339
	or Joyce & Gordon Edward	(01467) 681525
Aberfeldy -	Robin Baker	(01887) 820339
Dundee -	Elliott Forsyth	(01333) 451788
Peebles -	Julian Goodacre	(01721) 722539

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

Daily (Every day except Mondays, Thursday afternoons & Sunday evenings)

MORNING

7.00 Meditation
7.40 Morning service
8.15 Breakfast

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. You are welcome to stay for breakfast. *7.00am – 7.20am*

Evening practice

Meditation, walking meditation, meditation, evening office. You are welcome to stay on for tea. *7.30pm – 8.45pm*

Introductory evenings

Will be held on the second Friday of each month. A short talk about Buddhist practice and the Serene Reflection Meditation (Soto Zen) tradition. Meditation instruction and discussion. *7.30pm-9pm*
May 11th, June 8th, July 13th, August 10th

Wednesday 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*

Meditation days

These days alternate between Saturdays & Sundays. See centre pages for details. 35 min meditation on the hour every hour, followed by walking meditation and a 15 min break. *10am-4pm (Saturdays)*
1pm-4pm (Sundays)

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*