

—Portobello Buddhist Priory—



A Temple of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives



*Rev Master Jiyu-Kennett, Founder of our Order
In her memory on the 10th anniversary of her death*

Calendar of Events

January to April 2007

Portobello Buddhist Priory
27 Brighton Place, Portobello
Edinburgh, EH15 1LL
telephone and fax (0131) 669 9622
email: prior@pbpriory1.freeserve.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 2007

Sunday 7th	Renewal of Precepts	11am
Sunday 21st	Festival of the Buddha's Renunciation	11am

February

Sunday 4th	Festival of Maitreya Bodhisattva	11am
Sunday 18th	Renewal of Precepts	11am

March

Sunday 4th	Festival of Achalanatha	11am
Sunday 18th	Renewal of Precepts	11am

April

Sunday 1st	Festival of Great Master Keizan	11am
Sunday 15th	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* —

Perhaps one of the most popular and recognisable images of the Buddha is that of the Great Enlightenment, where he sits serene and awakened under the Bodhi tree, embodying peace and quiet joy. Also when we think of the memorable stories from the life of the Buddha we may recall his near miraculous turning around of the serial killer, Angulimala, from a path of hate to one of compassion for all life. Another story tells of the Buddha's use of skilful means in teaching a grieving mother the universality of death.

There may be a tendency when we hear such stories to idealise the figure of the Buddha, to grant him the almost god-like status of performing miracles of healing. There is a tendency to wish for something to look up to which transcends our awareness of human limitation. But with this view, I feel, comes the danger of creating a gap between ourselves and the Buddha and therefore casting a doubt upon our ability to walk the path of liberation he offers.

So a story that for me brings the humanity of the Buddha into focus while not denying the awakened nature of that humanity is that recounting of how in his later years he attempted to negotiate a peace settlement between his own clan and a neighbouring one, interested in territorial expansion. We're told that he was twice successful in averting war, but realised when a third confrontation arose that he was unable to prevent the karmic consequences of greed, hate and delusion manifesting in the minds and actions of these people. And seeing what the sad consequences would be in terms of human suffering he withdrew to a hillside over-looking the proposed battlefield where we are told he wept.

Inside this issue—

<i>Shoyen Saku</i>	2
<i>Visitors—</i>	4
<i>The Guesthouse— a poem</i>	5
<i>Open Hands</i>	6
<i>Doing One's Best—</i>	7

I feel this story has an authentic and contemporary ring. We see both the Buddha's attempts at right effort and his humble acceptance of the fact that he could not control the events of his world. We also recognise how his deep sense of empathy reveals an open vulnerable heart. At the same time is it not suggested in his withdrawal to the hillside from the scene of the battle that the true refuge cannot be dependent upon the changing conditions of our lives?

(Continued on page 4)

(Continued from page 3)

I don't feel this story is one of failure, denying that first image of the awakened figure under the tree. The awakening releases the imperative to compassion which results in the Buddha's life of service. He has let go of the fear, hatred and greed in his own heart and the seeds of his training continue to bear fruit every time one of us chooses to not indulge these three poisons. The story gives us a glimpse of the obvious humanity of Shakyamuni weeping on the hillside - but he is still sitting, and I feel we can have confidence in our own training in the knowledge that beneath the tears is the same stillness, the absolute 'yes' response of the awakened one under the Bodhi tree.

Shoyen Saku

Shoyen Shaku, the first Zen teacher to come to America, said 'My heart burns like fire but my eyes are as cold as dead ashes'¹. This rather striking saying points, for me, to some important aspects of meditation practice.

My eyes are as cold as dead ashes - The eyes are our chief sense organ. Many things enter the senses and our practice is to let them do so without seeking too much stimulation. The senses help us to learn and act effectively in the world. They can also be used as a distraction from uncomfortable experiences. When we get caught up in this, we can be left with a sense of lassitude or emptiness. The mind is also regarded as a sense organ in Buddhism. The equivalent distraction in the mind is to identify with our fleeting thoughts so they appear real and solid, leading to the creation of an overly strong sense of self. So the terms '*cold*' and '*dead ashes*' can be seen as meaning utilising and deeply appreciating the senses without using the information they provide to draw ourselves away from awareness.

My heart burns like fire - In connecting with awareness there is a sense of life and activity. We see our inner landscape: the feelings, thoughts and sensations. If the emotional

winds are blowing strongly, this can feel like a fire internally. Again, the temptation is to use the senses and external stimulation to try and separate from this but if we stay with it, we see it changing and passing. Burning also has a cleansing function and, in a way that is difficult to define, this cleansing can be sensed as we connect with the stillness.

Fire also provides warmth, of course. Warm qualities such as tenderness and benevolence arise naturally as we learn to let go of fear, anger and desire. We can cultivate these warm qualities with regard to both ourselves and others and their expression often seems to arise by simply accepting what is here and taking the next step.

Another quality of fire is brightness. In seeking to act compassionately, there is often no immediate feedback as to how helpful the act is. Even so, there is a quiet joy, beyond the level of the emotions, from the knowledge that we are seeking to live in harmony with the ways things really are.

1. Repts, P. and Senzaki, N. (eds.) (1957) *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones*. Shambala Publications, Ch.22.

Neil Rothwell, Lay Minister



*Ceremony at Throssel Hole Abbey to mark the 10th anniversary of our Founder,
Rev Master Jiyu-Kennett*

So often we are swayed by the ebb and flow of our ever-changing thoughts, emotions and memories. In our 'lostness' we are driven by feelings, wanting pleasant happy ones, trying to escape from those that are painful or challenging. The process of chasing after the former and trying to escape from the latter creates and holds us in a state of agitation and distress. Rev Master would repeatedly remind us to sit still in faith and trust the meditation.

We can have faith that there is something within us that is not lost. This has nothing to do with hope or belief, it is trusting an inner knowing (that we may or may not be consciously aware of in the early days of our training) that within us is a place of peace that has never been touched by any thought, feeling or emotion, a place that is deeper than any memory or experience we have been through, no matter how terrible it may have been. That is the Refuge, it's what we find when we meditate It IS meditation, it is that upon which we can rely.

*- from the article 'In Gratitude' by Rev Master Myoho Harris in the special edition of the
OBC Journal to mark Rev Master Jiyu's anniversary*

Visitors —

I presume most of us have some regular visitors to our sitting place, unwelcome thoughts and feelings—fear about what lies ahead, anger toward him or her or oneself, regrets, confusion - a different group of visitors for each of us.

In daily life too, when I am not too engrossed or distracted, I notice these ‘companions’, often in the background, but at times of distress huge and all around. At times of joy there are others visitors too, more welcome, and perhaps even a little space for some compassion, love or wisdom.

On my un-welcome guest list is one called ‘overwhelmed-ness’, the sense of drowning in tasks, duties, information, choices and commitments. A dizziness mixing panic and futility, that demands that I ‘act’, but at the same time freezes the frame and takes away my ability to respond: a plate-spinner with his feet suddenly glued to the floor.

There is a tendency to think this is a curse of the modern world, due to TV and internet induced information overload, traffic jams and the pace of life, but I wonder whether this is so. Do I have more or greater pressures on me than my grandmother who had nine children, no ready-meals, dishwasher or Calpol and then watched one son go off to war? Perhaps she met her ‘guests’ when barring in the hens at dusk, while I meet mine as the e-mails pile up.

When trying to keep overwhelmed-ness from the door, I began by focussing on external demands . Although I find it helpful to say ‘no’ to some additional commitments, to get tasks off my mind by writing lists, to try to avoid ‘what-if’ think-

ing and last minute panics over bills and childcare, still much of the common chaos of life continues.

There are systems for getting organised and managing pressure but, for me, it has been more helpful to try to notice my habits and what may lie behind them. I tend to watch the news on the TV even though I have heard it on the car radio a short while before. Why is that? I feel that I should know more about some subject. Do I go too far? I respond to particular situations in certain ways. What might someone else do? I feel it is my job to do such-and-such a thing. Is it? I sometimes add to the overwhelmed-ness. What is that all about? Questions like these do not expect answers or analysis. They serve more as prompts, reminding me to notice what is happening and what I am feeling (or avoiding) when I make choices. The noticing, rather than the answering, is where usefulness begins. Noticing provides an opportunity to choose rather than being carried by the momentum of habit. Even before the choosing, noticing is a step into freedom. Without the noticing the choice or action that follows seems only to add to the confusion and the overwhelmed-ness. The patterns of daily life continue when I sit too: analysing, following habits, setting standards, looking to external causes. The overwhelmed-ness brings a swarm of thoughts to swat at and be bitten by. The here and now is not always a comfortable place to be and it sometimes seems convenient to leave, but where is there to go? Such ‘leaving’ has its consequences too. So, still my unwelcome visitor remains. Wishing him away is a poor and

frustrating option. Noticing the wishing-him-away, my unwillingness to be here, may be a beginning. But setting up a goal of being free of the feeling looks like yet another distraction from the present, a some-day that may never be.

Where I go my visitor follows, yet the more willing I am to allow him house-room, warts and all, the less disturbing he seems to be. Despite the distractions and discomfort, there are times when I can bide with him. The unease and the pull to leave are part of the biding too. So is recognising that my visitor grows stronger and weaker, that he shares a space with other feelings, with unrelated sights and sounds, the pattern on the wall, a noise, an ache. There is more going on than just the overwhelmed-ness. I notice myself in

a defensive posture, unsure of what I am, uneasy about what others may think if I am not the doer, the knower, the copier, protective of my self-image. The standards I have set, my holding on and pushing away, have created and strengthened this visitor.

It seems that I have made this suffering and confusion at least partly from the stuff that makes up me. The visitor offers me these unwelcome lessons. Can I let him come and go while resisting the habit of stoking the flames or retouching the image? I do not know. And so again he comes to call, he and other visitors too.

- from a Sangha member

The Guesthouse

This being human is a guest house

Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!

Even if they are a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still treat each guest honourably.

He may be clearing you out for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.

Rumi

Open Hands -

At a recent intensive meditation retreat at Throssel Hole, one of my 'dharma interview' questions to Rev Master Daishin was about a fear I have had for pretty much as long as I can remember of being physically trapped somehow. As I grew up this fear developed and now I tend to avoid lifts, airplanes and even trains as when I'm on them I can feel extremely uncomfortable. I had always felt that I would 'deal' with this along the way somehow but I'd started to think that really, by now, I shouldn't still be acting on this fear and I'd also noticed it extended further than I had previously realised. What Rev Master asked was; was I willing to be with that? Was I willing to sit/be with the unwillingness to go into these situations? Being asked this really brought to the fore that I felt that there was something wrong with the way I was. It began to hit me that we can get so caught up in 'I shouldn't act on fear', 'I shouldn't feel this way' – basically that there's something wrong and we need to change whatever it is. I began to see more clearly that none of this really matters – what arises is what arises – fear, attachment, greed, hate – whatever it is, all that matters is to look directly at what is arising with open hands, feeling out what is good to do and doing this as best we can. Anything else is just something we add on. Sometimes I can also get a sense of breaking the precepts when I knowingly act on this fear because even though I can see that the fear itself is both ungraspable and based on the delusion that there is a 'me' here to protect from feeling it, I still act on it and see this as a turning away from the Buddha refuge of letting go and thus continuing suffering. What I have found though, is that there is no turning away, it's just that until I can really come to know this fear deeply and see where I am holding on, what is good to do is naturally going to somehow take the fear into account.

A revelation for me this year has been that 'what is good to do' really isn't an ideal but is the next step for us in the circumstances we are in. So, if this means not taking the lift and going for the stairs because it's my deepest sense of what is good to do in that moment, then I do this wholeheartedly, being present with everything that arises from this. In my experience, over time, I begin to find some clarity on where I am holding on. I feel it's good to point out that I am not referring to the precepts here as ideals, just that we can unhelpfully use them in this way when we think about what is good to do as ideal preceptual living.

I've also noticed that we can create further difficulty when we view what is good to do as some sort of hidden jewel in each moment, and if only we could find it we would know exactly what is required in some absolute way, which is a rather dangerous view if taken seriously. There is a passage in the *Shobogenzo* which I think expresses that what is good to do really isn't some sort of fixed thing or any sort of ideal that's the same for everyone, but rather it's what flows from living with open hands as best we can. It reads as follows:

'Although all that is good resides within the quality of 'being good', it does not mean that what is good exists somewhere and is waiting for someone to put it into operation....what is good depends on what 'world' you are talking about, for it will not always be perceived as the same thing, since people consider what is good from their own perspective.'

Kimberley Cadden

Doing One's Best, Moment by Moment -

I recently completed a job as a Human Resources consultant for a big company. For many years, the employees had been requesting a change to their shift pattern. They saw the current pattern, which had been imposed by management, as unreasonable. Management thought there were many more important issues to address and that any change ran the risk of creating even more complaints. For both parties this was an emotive issue, with a long and painful history of misunderstandings and mistrust. Finally, when relations become very strained for other reasons, management agreed to a study in the hope that this would improve things.

A working group of staff and local managers was established, with a steering committee of more senior managers to oversee the project. My job was to support the study group, to facilitate the management decision making associated with the work and to help both parties to understand the concerns of the other. In this sense I found myself acting as 'piggy in the middle', and this raised some perceptual issues.

Matters came to a head as the study neared its conclusion. A solution that was agreeable to both seemed close, but there was one issue that remained a major concern to some of the managers.

This issue had been known at the outset and by its nature was one which staff found difficult to accept. To complicate matters, both of the most senior managers who would decide things had changed.

Shortly before the working group were to present their findings to the steering committee, I was invited to a meeting with the new senior managers. Because people were

away, I could not contact anyone about its purpose, though it was scheduled the day before the steering committee. When I met with the working group to prepare the presentation, I chose not to tell them about the pre-meeting for fear that this would sow doubts about the motives and credibility of the new senior managers – this seemed like the least bad option.

The pre-meeting unfolded as I had feared, with major concerns expressed about the one outstanding issue. This was a difficult meeting for me. I could foresee a very negative reaction from employees if the work that had raised their expectations was stopped for reasons that were anticipated before the study was launched. I felt that the meeting did not fully understand just how damaging this reaction might be to future relations. Of course, because it was 'my project' I recognised that I might be overly attached to a particular outcome, although it was not my decision. On the other hand I felt that the decision-makers would come to regret their choice once they saw the strength of the reaction that would follow. I tried not to say too much, but to express my views as clearly as I could in professional language, recognising that this was not my decision. The meeting ended without any conclusion, but with a view forming that delay or cancellation was the best option.

I felt very bad about things. There was a sense that the work was going to lead to a very damaging and avoidable conflict, and on a personal level that I had screwed up the job and been disloyal to both parties. Writing these words now, I can see how much self is involved in these feelings. I can also recognise this 'caught in the middle of a

(Continued on page 8)

(Continued from page 7)

conflict' pattern and intense feelings of guilt and rejection as one of the themes of my life. As teenager I had recurring nightmares that the world had been destroyed by a conflict that I had somehow created. At the time I did not see this, but underneath the swirl of thoughts and emotions there was something sitting still that recognised the insubstantiality of the 'drama'.

Late that day I was able to have a phone discussion to forewarn two other influential members of the steering committee (who I had invited to the pre-meeting but who couldn't come). The following morning I had a final meeting with the two presenters from the working group to have a last minute run through the presentation. It still did not feel good to tell them about the events of the previous day, even though on one level this seemed like a manipulative deception. The presentation to the steering committee went well and although they knew that there would be further deliberation before a final decision, the presenters left feeling confident that their recommendations would be accepted. Later that day I discovered that the two managers I had phoned had managed to persuade the other senior managers to support the project proceeding.

At the end of this process, I have the sense of how complex and delicate human situations are and how we only ever see a small part of what is actually happening. I think the human dynamics expressed in this situation have a universal quality. Whenever there is a requirement for a collective decision, be it in a family, an institution or a nation, the murkiness and uncertainty that I have described will often be present. As individuals we are required to act in these

situations, and of necessity we have only a very limited view of what is happening. But we still have to play our part.

Reflecting on my own part in what I have described above I can see how I might have done some things differently and perhaps avoided the last minute wobble. Although there are lessons to be learned from this reflection, I also realise that perfection is a merciless judge. It is enough that I act with a good intention doing my best not to engage with that which I can currently recognise as selfish. This work could have resulted in a further breakdown of trust between two groups, a situation sometimes seen in history before a war. These situations arise through a complex interplay of conditions and the choices made by many people. Although the feelings of responsibility expressed in my dreams of the world's end were very painful, I can now recognise that they are founded on a delusion. I am only responsible for my own actions and am not in control of anything. I recognise these 'caught in the middle feelings' arising in many situations in my life and on one level could describe them as part of my karmic pattern. But as with life situations, I know how limited my view is in this area and that this kind of understanding does not seem to help make choices in the moment. This understanding itself is another aspect of the insubstantiality of thoughts and feelings, and provides no basis for action.

Meditation seems to provide a deeper context which carries over into ordinary life and which helps us to see the swirl of our own thoughts and feelings as part of the bigger picture within which we act.

Bob McGraw, Lay Minister



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





- Events elsewhere in Scotland with the Prior -

February 2007

Friday 23rd	Aberfeldy group evening	7.30-9pm
Saturday 24th	Dundee group morning	10am-1pm
Sunday 25th	Aberdeen Day Retreat	10am-4pm
Monday 26th	Aberdeen group evening	6.30-9pm

March

Friday 23rd	Aberfeldy group evening	7.30-9pm
Saturday 24th	Dundee group morning	10am-1pm
Sunday 25th	Aberdeen Day Retreat	10am-4pm
Monday 26th	Aberdeen group evening	6.30-9pm

April

Friday 20th	Aberfeldy group evening	7.30-9pm
Saturday 21st	Dundee group morning	10am-1pm
Sunday 22nd	Aberdeen Day Retreat	10am-4pm
Monday 23rd	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*
January 12th, February 9th, March 9th, April 13th

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*