

# —Portobello Buddhist Priory—



A Temple of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives



*A Sangha Zoom gathering during Covid-19!  
(with sincere thanks to Niamh Murphy for the drawing)*

## Newsletter January—April 2021

**Portobello Buddhist Priory**  
**27 Brighton Place, Portobello**  
**Edinburgh, EH15 1LL**  
**Telephone (0131) 669 9622**  
**website: [www.portobellobuddhist.org.uk](http://www.portobellobuddhist.org.uk)**

# Newsletter

67th edition  
December 2020  
(& 27th e-edition)

**Please Note:** this issue of our Newsletter doesn't contain a schedule of events. Due to Covid-19 it still seems wise for the Sangha not to come together for meetings, either here at the Priory or around the country in our respective groups with the Prior. We'll continue for now coming together for meditation, dharma and ceremony on the Zoom platform each week.

## — Prior's Notes —

**I**n his novel '*The Trial*' Franz Kafka included the parable entitled '*Before the Law*' about a man who goes seeking the Law and is confronted by a guard who stands before an open door.

The guard assures him that the Law he seeks lies within, but won't let him pass. So the man spends the rest of his life there, trying to convince the guard to let him enter; he begs and cajoles him, he engages in small talk and attempts to bribe him. When finally the man is about to die, he asks the guard, "I've been here all this time, why has no one else come this way seeking the Law?" And the guard says, "No one else could have come this way, since this gate was built only for you."

A possible interpretation of this parable from a meditation practice perspective might say: There is a gatekeeper to the present moment, and it's our own minds, it's our identification with each passing thought. This next thought is the gatekeeper, and yet the door stands wide open to wisdom and freedom from self limitation and to the full satisfaction of connecting with life in the present.

The present moment stands wide open right now and yet our thoughts won't allow us to pass through it, and this moment is ours alone, this is our door, whether we pass through it is our business entirely, no one can do it for us. This next thought, unrecognized, is the gatekeeper. And yet seen for what it is, we find that we've already passed him, already free of the problem, already identical to the bright unimpeded space of our "primordial mind" as R.M. Daishin says in 'Sitting Buddha'. This 'Mind' that everyone has, is our True Nature but it takes a lot of practice to be able to recognise it and actualise it in our daily lives.

Once knowledge of the True Nature begins to be awakened within us, there is a light that never goes out completely. And the knowing of the True Nature underlies whatever comes and goes.

We can only come to this place if we're willing to let go of everything that the mind attaches to. If we give rise to clinging then the gatekeeper blocks our way, but the next moment brings a new opportunity to relinquish that mistake and discover we've never actually left our true home. To come to this we have to sit with a keen and clear mind that is not deliberately giving rise to chasing thoughts and feelings, yet is aware of whatever thoughts and feelings may come.

We have to adopt the nature of this pure mind in order to know it, and this is ultimately possible because we are that mind. As R.M. Jiyu put it: "Look with the eye of a Buddha and you will see the heart of a Buddha."



*A poem & a haiku from 2020 —*

**A** lone  
In the house  
With a sangha,  
Virtual  
And very real.

*Neil Rothwell*

**T**hat was the year  
when  
everything shut down  
and all we could hear  
were the birds.  
That was the year when  
we hid from each other  
and couldn't say goodbye  
to the dying.  
That was the year when  
we found out what  
was essential and what  
was inessential.  
That was the year when  
I unstitched a mask.  
That was the year when  
I found out there was a  
human need to reach  
out and touch others.

*Eric Nicholson*

## *Our training during this year 2020 —*

**O**ur Prior suggested to us at an online sangha meeting that we might wish to write some words about our training during this year 2020, with all it brought. Here are some of the shorter responses:-

“ It has been a transformative year in which the fragility of life and routine has been revealed. This has led to a change of pace and priorities that might never have happened otherwise. ”

*Joseph Apted*

“ Training during this year 2020 – Despite awareness of the challenges facing planet earth and its inhabitants in 2020 and beyond, I never, never for a moment doubted the teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha. My Homages to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha never faltered. ”

*Gordon Edwards*

“ *Challenging times....*  
Intense, claustrophobic at times, testing, unsettling, magnifying predilections and aversions, working from home, in my head.

*In gratitude to.....*  
Scottish Sangha, walking, podcasts, working from home, community, new connections, local neighborhood, the internet, technology. ”

*Michael O'Hara*

“ This year I have been training with a life of smaller, local, compass enriched by birdsong and the discovery of a Sangha on Zoom, with whom it has been a joy to meditate, from whom I have learnt so much. In gassho, ”

*Alasdair Hosking*

— *and some longer ones* —



Well, the lock down for me has presented various challenges. Painting and redecorating, doing all those little jobs that tend to get left for another day, phoning friends and neighbours and of course my true obsession - reading.

Having so much spare time gave me the opportunity to read books like A.C. Grayling's 'Democracy and its Crisis', rather fitting given our present political situation. Also Leo Tolstoy's 'The Kingdom of God Is Within You', which was quite challenging on several levels. I also decided to reread some of my Buddhist books, as several of them offer so much teaching that one reading is never enough.

My personal favourite is 'Don't take your life Personally' by Ajahn Sumedho: it offers so much insight into human behaviour in a way that is both compassionate and practical. I often find myself becoming aware of my own reactivity to situations based on inaccurate perceptions and conclusions, taking situations 'personally', and not looking at the reality of the moment, free from personal expectations and desires.

The book I'm reading at the moment is 'After Buddhism' by Stephen Batchelor. Some may see his work as somewhat controversial, and definitely thought-provoking. His interpretation of the Four Noble Truths as the four noble tasks offers a different vision. And I'm enjoying his portrayal of the Buddha as a man who was dealing with a world that was changing on all fronts, political, social economic and religious. How familiar does that sound.

*Gabriele Smith*



**T**he pandemic has been hard for people in different ways but like everything there is always an upside if you look hard enough. It has brought out the best in a lot of people, health care workers, carers, essential workers and people in general who have all put themselves at risk to help others and be there for other people in need. It has been wonderful to see the outpouring of compassion and how people have helped each other in these difficult times.

For me personally my practice has sustained me during the pandemic and one of the unforeseen benefits has been the Sangha connecting on zoom, thank you to Reverend Favian and all who helped make this happen. It has been great to connect with the sangha again, established and new. Even on zoom it feels as if we are part of something and there is a sense of belonging and in many ways it's different but the same so thank you everyone for logging on and being there.

*Janis Ross*



**W**ith Covid -19 and lockdowns/social distancing practice became more simple – more ‘chop wood, carry water’. To be honest our life here in the village is always pretty quiet, so at first we did not notice much difference, other than more enquiries about our own and others well-being and offers of support and help.

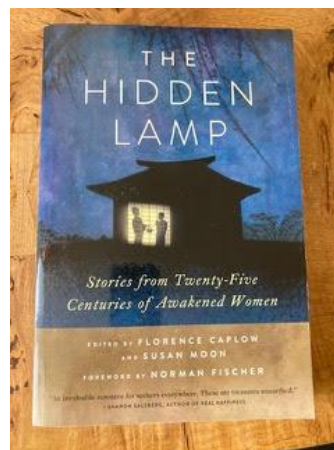
I practice zazen each morning and evening, do household chores and see what is good to do at the Garden Project I volunteer with. Being there has been a boon and we have made sure it is a safe place for a few folk to come and do socially distanced tasks as well as a chance to make and keep

contact with others. The Garden therapy group continues and we practice some meditation and mindful walking alongside garden tasks. We were able to work on 'what is good to do' and made more vegetable beds and encouraged folk to grow fresh vegetables for selves and others. We shared our harvests with each other and with a local community kitchen and lunch club. We have increased our areas for biodiversity, leaving some wild areas and planting pollinator friendly plants, we have planted hedges and trees and we have seen more birds and insects as all of this grows.

I have also been using zoom and took the opportunity to make contact with Upaya Zen Center (which I first visited in 2015) I undertook some online trainings with them in particular their Spring Practice Period: Honouring Women of the Way which was an emotional and powerful experience— using the collection of writings by Buddhist women and modern day commentaries on them from contemporary women Buddhist practitioners - *The Hidden Lamp: Stories from Twenty-Five Centuries of Awakened Women*, edited by Florence Caplow and Susan Moon along with other writings. I thoroughly recommend this book!

So practice is simple and has seemed straightforward – offer help, be kind, share and be open to what is offered from nature or from zoom!

*Jerry Simcock*





*‘The temple bell stops – but the sound keeps coming out of the flowers’ - Basho*

In a year that has brought darkness for so many, there have also been moments of clarity and light, of reconnecting with that which may have been neglected or forgotten, of discovering new possibilities and unexpected simple joys. On a personal level, I'm grateful for having discovered Sunday morning Zoom services with Rev. Favian and the Scottish Sangha. Almost two decades ago, I was involved with the Aberdeen group at a period of my life when I was searching for direction. The clarity and space found in Zen sitting led to the emergence of a new path as a guitar tutor (unfortunately leading to leaving the group due to teaching commitments at the time).

An unexpected joy has been to return to piano playing after pretty much a twenty-year break. Initially a practical decision with the uncertainty of gig income (due to restrictions) and the obvious benefits of offering tuition in a second instrument, it has revitalised a passion for playing, and rekindled a love for my favourite composers.

After happening across a webinar about mindfulness and creativity in music, I was inspired to attempt to write a first short piece on piano and have called the result 'Hands Together'. The title, for me, suggests both gratitude and unity: hands together in gassho or prayer, the holding together of the Sangha in lockdown, the bringing together of that which may have been lost, buried, or disregarded to our present situation, to now. When learning a piece on piano we begin with separate hands, and play with 'hands together' when ready, when the music is in our fingers! And so, with gratitude, I dedicate this short simple offering of music to the Scottish Sangha!

I've made a couple of videos of a Bach prelude and the wee piece I've written:-

[Bach Prelude](#)  
[Hands Together](#)

*Dave Inkster*





**T**he idea of everything being interconnected has been the strongest matter that has been with me this year. Odd in a way because, like most people I guess, I have had less contact with others during this year than normal. In the early part of the initial lockdown when we were having difficulty getting supermarket deliveries our next-door neighbours, realising that I was shielding, did shopping for us, not something that would happen in normal times but it really brought home how interlinked we all are. And experiencing the natural world provided many uplifting, interconnected moments, as with the blackbird that serenaded us in the garden just about every day during the spring and summer.

*Anthony Linforth*



**C**losed mind. A year ago, if anyone had suggested having meditation and ceremonies on the internet, my mind would have instantly rejected the idea. **Closed mind.**

**Open mind!** But since lockdown our twice weekly Sangha Zoom sessions have become such a rich and valuable part of my week and have helped me deepen my daily practice. Meditating together, being part of ceremonies, reading and discussing Dharma, sharing our understandings, doubts, sadnesses, joys, laughter, community, growth. **Open mind!**

It is yet another reminder that

**I don't have to believe everything that I think.**

**Homage to the Buddha. Homage to the Dharma. Homage to the Sangha.**

*Julian Goodacre*



I have been fortunate as a retired person living in a comfortable house and neighbourhood to have felt very protected. It made me feel very grateful for the fortune in my life and a lot of compassion for how difficult it is for so many people here and everywhere else. One of the highlights of this past nine months is the support of the Sangha under the leadership of Reverend Favian. The teachings, his 'thought for the day' in zazen and contributions from everybody have been very inspiring. I am finding it difficult to identify one element that has been particularly memorable. I keep on reading my favourite bits of 'Buddha Recognises Buddha' and every sentence seems to be an appropriate quote for what is important to me. In my own words it is something about the challenges of an active acceptance of what is – including the personal dilemmas and fluctuating moods – and real emotional engagement with a way of being that is not harmful and is helpful. The analogy with addictions is particularly powerful as a way of being compassionate for our causes and conditions while not being stuck in them. The seriousness combined with the warm sense of humour of the Sangha's meetings are a delight! Thank you everybody.

*Tom Frank*



The main event that had an impact on my life and on my practice this year was my father's death. The pandemic has not affected me as much personally. There is a lot to absorb from a contact with intense human suffering and from death of a close person. I had experienced periods of intense anguish when I could not meditate. But I did find scripture recitations and prayers very helpful and I feel like my relationship with those aspects of my practice got a lot deeper. The Litany of the Great Compassionate One is particularly dear to my heart, I have been thinking and reading a lot about the bodhisattva of compassion.

*Anatoly Konechny*

## *The discipline of gratitude —*

**A** very unpopular word these days – 'discipline'.

I was set thinking when we discussed gratitude on one of our recent Wednesday evening zooms. I said at the time, that for me gratitude did not come naturally when I was younger and before I started to meditate. Of course I was often moved by the beauty and intelligence of Nature, and was aware of my good fortune in having a roof over my head and food in my fridge, and so on. But I didn't always go that one step further – putting my hands in gassho or on my heart and giving thanks to what I would call the God within.

I needed to practice and make it a discipline.

I am doubly blessed – as I not only have the Scottish Sangha to remind me of my practice, but the Findhorn (Foundation) Community of which I am a part practises gratitude as the norm. For example, when meeting in a group of any kind it is common to begin with a round of gratitude. So I have been given every encouragement to attend to this as a practice – something to consciously cultivate.

After some years I now experience gratitude, and often profound gratitude, bubbling up spontaneously very frequently. And what a joy that is!

With gratitude for this Sangha, and in gassho,

*Ann Milston*

## *Reflections on Awakening & Relationships*

**R**ecently I listened to a recording of a Ram Dass lecture I found on Youtube; the title of the talk was 'Awakening & Relationships'. He opened with a story about a boatman: it was something like this;

*A boatman is rowing on a misty lake, the fog is thick. Suddenly he bumps another boat. He starts to scream profanities at the other boatman for not looking where he was going. The fog clears for a moment and he looks at the other boat and sees that it's empty.*

As our lives have become more condensed, in the sense that we cannot go out to do much, or see that many people, we are faced again and again with the relationships we have with those that we live with; family, friends, partners and so on. This has brought up for me my own anger and frustration towards others, or perhaps, how judgmental I can be when it comes to how I think others should live.

Having experienced life on retreats at Throssel, as well as taking on a meditation practice within my daily life, I have become aware of the way others around me are living in unhelpful ways. I have come to see that it's far too easy to see another's karma and to overlook your own. Too often my only reaction to this is to get angry. I do not think I'm the kind of person to give this anger any physical manifestation but mentally, it just keeps coming back again and again.

It was when I noticed that this anger followed me around and seemed to find its expression in different people that I have lived with, that a sense of humour revealed itself. Something about the other people, as in the story of the boatman, being empty, or at least empty of any reason for me to be angry at them. My anger was just something that their being was reflecting back at me; the anger is my problem. I understand that sometimes it is justified to feel at least some frustration towards another if they are living unhelpfully in a way that is directly

affecting your life, but I think, as Zen trainees, it is important to keep in mind that often our own anger and frustration towards another's 'unenlightened' way of life is not actually that helpful in the path of awakening, for either yourself or others. Perhaps here we can turn to

Sange as a practice and a refuge, recognising our own unhelpful actions, thoughts and intentions with the vow to overcome them for the benefit of others.

*Lucas Priest*



*Roots, Sanctuary wood, Bonally by Edinburgh (Willie Grieve)*

## *Zazen*

mood  
sit  
lonely  
sit  
thought  
sit  
feeling  
sit  
situation  
sit  
angry  
sit  
frustrated  
sit  
thought  
sit  
I'm going crazy  
sit  
stuck  
sit  
situation  
sit  
it's pointless  
sit  
nothing goes right  
sit  
thought  
sit  
sensation  
sit  
pleasant  
sit  
peaceful  
sit  
not nice  
sit  
sit  
sit

*Eric Nicholson*

## *Summer sitting*

Sitting under brim  
in dappled sunlight  
All comes and goes  
Ebbs and flows  
One incense stick  
A thin line of smoke smell drifts  
I sit happily, steadily  
Held in three points  
Light  
Upright  
Like a mountain  
I just sit  
Like I was told  
Nothing changes  
Nothing to do, nowhere to go  
I hear the birds  
and



the buzz of the friendly bees

(A Buddhist life is a fine life)

*Myra Rothwell*

## *Zen zoom*

Zen zoom  
Zooming light  
Among the rooms  
Friendly faces  
In their places  
Sharing dharma insights

*Jim Morrow*

---

## *Awoke this morning*

Awoke this morning and washed and  
dressed.  
Bowed to my sitting place and sat  
down.  
I went shopping and  
I wondered where were the small cans  
of beans  
They might have them in TESCO and  
Bowed and recited the Kesa verse.  
Ate breakfast.  
Went shopping.

*Graham Jordan*

## *Training With The Ideal And The Actual*

**M**any years ago I was impressed by an article by Reverend Fuden on the above topic. In these few lines and two photos I try to give an impression of my training in that spirit. I am giving you a METAPHOR, a THEME and a CONDITION.

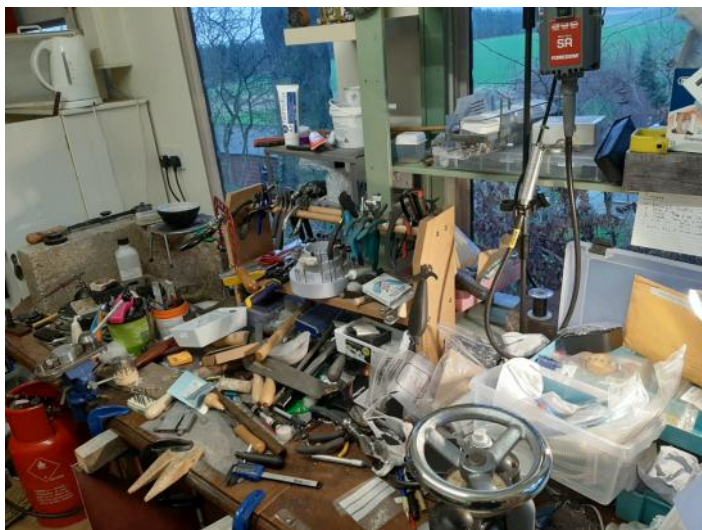
THE CONDITION, under which I train is ME. The impact on all aspects of life is summarised as follows.

1. Feeling drained and weak in a way that is not improved by rest.
2. Symptoms are worsened in a delayed effect by activity
3. Sleep is disturbed or refreshing.
4. Brain fog arises affecting word finding and memory.

I cannot train in the traditional way and have to adapt physically and mentally using the small dose approach known as pacing. Additionally, I am not protected from all these other problems of life, we all have and recognise.

THE THEME I have chosen is the ideal and the actual. My condition is my actuality. This does not prevent me having goals, be they from the eight fold path or from cooking a meal. My training may be the meditational equivalent of beans on toast, but still feeds. The actual is still the means to the ideal.

THE METAPHOR I present is my jewellery making. I have been learning to do this in fits and starts since my retirement. There is much to learn but you cannot make a ring from a book. There is nothing without practice. There is flame and flux, solder, saws, hammers, wire, plate, polishers, files, dust and dirt. No jewellery maker has pretty nails. To someone else my studio shed, the actual working area, resembles an abandoned messy heap. My mind and body know better. My hand remembers where I put down the saw. My eyes, where I placed the gemstone.



The other actuality I mentioned is practice. Given the state of my condition yesterday, my practice was to saw a 6mm length of 6mm diameter tube . Not straightforward as each end must be filed flat.

This leads me to the photographs. My

message is to not despair when any aspect of life grinds you down. There is a way through the actuality. You can use your actuality. It is the means to the ideal . I hope you see this in the photo of my studio bench and of a silver ring I made at this bench. The materials the tools and the means are all there!

I trust in mindfulness to lead the way through the actual towards the ideal.

*Joyce Edwards*



## *Seeking Something*

**I** was catching up with Reverend Favian on the phone recently and he reminded me of the deadline for the latest Sangha newsletter. Willie had also brought this to our attention on the latest Zoom call. Like many of you I am sure I really enjoy reading the newsletter and hearing about fellow Sangha members experience of Buddhist training. What should I write though I wondered? Life has felt a little difficult this year. I have experienced health issues this year and then the lockdown. Should I write about this? I almost did but felt it might be a little bleak and I wanted to write something uplifting. During the stifling atmosphere of lockdown I appreciate good news to help lift my spirit. So here is a short story of an epic journey that I made with my father in 2018. This story is about a truly majestic creature and our search to find it and bask in its presence for a short moment. It is not just a story of this creature but for me it links to my seeking something. Seeking a connection with my fellow beings, my practice, and the great mystery of life itself. So hold on tight. Here goes!

Rumours started to emerge amongst the birdwatching community of north east Scotland about 10 years ago that a magnificent creature had been seen off the north Aberdeenshire coast. The creature was said to have been seen by renowned birdwatchers who knew their stuff! During April and May it was seen on several occasions by different people. The creature was always seen floating on the sea, making occasional dives for food. It was always far out to sea just beyond the range of binoculars. Even with a scope identifying the creature or even spotting it at all, was extremely difficult.

My Dad and I were excited by these rumours and sightings. Could they be true? We travelled up to the Banffshire coast on several occasions to seek out the creature. We set off full of hope but alas we never did catch a glimpse of the elusive beast. We sat clad in multiple layers of clothes; our scopes fixed on the sea for hours as the wind sculpted the wrinkles on our faces. Frozen and defeated we returned home wondering if this was just a myth after all. Then in 2018 we heard of some promising news. A local boat owner had heard of the great search for the creature and had answered the call. This Banff sailor knew where these creatures lurked and for a small fee,

he was willing to take a bunch of seekers out to search for it. Wow, this sounded fantastic and my father booked two spaces for us on the next sailing. The boat would sail at 5.00am from Banff, a fifty-mile drive from Aberdeen. This is earlier than the rising at Throssel, which I thought was tough enough! We made it just in time and there were ten seekers eagerly armed with binoculars and cameras. Our guides for the day were a fantastic elderly couple who must have been in their early seventies. The husband was the sailor and the wife gave us our safety brief and looked after us so well for the rest of the day. Braw Aberdeenshire folk, always with a story to tell and a constant conveyer belt of tea, coffee, and home-made pieces being produced from a small kitchen.

We set off, and eyes were keenly focused on the sea. Hardly anyone spoke as the seeking had begun and this was serious business. Thankfully, the sea was calm, but I still felt slightly queasy. An hour past by and still no sight of the mythical beast. Then a shout from the front of the boat, “over there” someone shouted excitedly. The seekers rushed to the front of the boat and the skipper spun the boat round and headed in the direction of the pointing fingers. Still I could not see anything as others shouted in awe, “There it is!”

Eventually though, there it was only thirty feet from the boat, bobbing in the water seemingly oblivious to our boat. I had waited years for this moment. A bird I thought I would never see, and it was in its full summer plumage as well. There it was - a White-Billed Loon. I couldn't take my eyes off its beak. Pure radiant white, almost hard to believe it could be that white, shining like a torch, long and sharp. Then its magnificent rising neck and head that descended into a long elon-





gated dark  
body. I looked  
over to the  
coast, we were  
about five  
miles out I  
thought. I  
thought of me  
and my Dad  
sitting on that  
coast, cold, as  
we searched  
with our  
scopes. If  
some poor

soul was sitting there now the chances were this bird was too far out for them to see it. How lucky I felt to be witnessing this sight.

Later and even now at this time of lockdown and covid I think back on that trip. Why did it make me feel so happy? Partly it was the beauty of the White-Billed Loon, sharing this experience with my father and the sense of camaraderie amongst my fellow seekers on the boat and also how the old couple looked after us all that day. Bird-watching might seem boring to some. But for me it is awe-inspiring. Just knowing these great creatures are out there, briefly, just on the edge of our known world, beyond the mundane. When the seasons change, I notice the Swallows and Martins slowly disappear as they head off to Africa. I feel sad to see them leave and wonder about their journey ahead, over sea and desert, before they reach sub-Saharan forests. I hope they make it and come back to visit next year. But then my heart rises again as the winter birds return from the northern tundra. Geese fly across the sky in great arrows, Redwings near the Dee, Farefields in the parks and who know maybe Waxwings on the rowan trees at Garthdee!

I have thought about my interest with birds often during lockdown when many things have been taken away. I realise these curtailments of my freedoms are for good reason and I support them but despite this I feel less free

and at times it has dampened my mood. But the birds though have been a constant. Just watching them on the feeders in the garden has brought me so much pleasure. Is this seeking like Buddhist practice? Why do I practice at all? What drew me to this beautiful way of Buddhist life? Was it a need to feel connected, to be at ease, to know that I am part of something greater than myself and to see beauty in the mundane? Zen scriptures speak often about being mindful. Eat when you eat and sleep when you sleep. Perhaps I could add bird-watch when you bird-watch. I feel I need reminders of the beauty in the world especially during lockdown. That might be the camaraderie of a Sangha zoom call, joining a Throssel online retreat or seeking some great creature like the White-Billed Diver or reading a scripture with wise words from the sages of old. So maybe look up at the birds, even if you don't know its name, it doesn't know it either, just enjoy the sight and let it help you to connect with this great mysterious life.

As an interesting aside. The old couple only ran the boat trip for two consecutive seasons, 8 trips in total I am told. I believe I was on the last trip they made. So the White-Billed Diver is as elusive as ever again! It is still spotted by some, miles out to sea in April and May. I feel extremely lucky to be one of the few people to have ever been so close to this magnificent bird.

*Thane Lawrie*



## *Inheritance texts*

**M**y first wife Sharon died of cancer in 2002. She had been following the Buddhist path before I first met her. Some of the older members of our Sangha will remember her as she was part of our Zen Sangha even before the Portobello Priory was set up. At the time of her initial diagnosis, however, I had only just begun to take a few tentative steps in Buddhist meditation practice. After her death I eventually set about sorting through her letters and paperwork and three of many texts that I came upon continue to nourish me in my life.

The first one that I found is in her handwriting and contains two quotes:

*.... The path of love is not a path of comfort, it means going forward into the unknown, with no guarantees of safety, even though you're afraid. Trusting is dangerous, but without trust there is no hope for love, and love is all we ever have to hold against the dark.*

*"Be satisfied that ye have enough light to secure another foothold".  
T. S. Eliot.*

I don't know where she took the first quote from and I will never know if she had copied them out before we had even met, or possibly in the last weeks of her life as a private message to me. But in those early dark days of bereavement I took great comfort from that reminder to risk loving again. I have given many copies of this away to other people who are taking that risk to follow the path of love.

Later I found a laminated card that was made at Shasta Abbey dated 1993. On the front is printed:

*Jewel bright is the Boundless Sea,  
its surface churning with the waves  
of births and deaths; the gate to the  
Great Tranquillity dissolves the  
shapes of past and present, the  
forms of coming and going. We  
pray that the darkness of our delusion  
may be illuminated by True  
Compassion.*

I now recite this text at the start of my sitting practice. I made some enquiries at Throssel and it was Rev. Alina who instantly began to sing it and after delving into one of the Monastic Or-

der books she identified that it was an extract from the Offertory for *"Monthly Celebration for a Venerable Elder or Previous Abbott"*. On the back of the card there is a Post-it note in neat handwriting: *P.S. picked this card up at Shasta Abbey when I visited there this summer; one of my favorite quotes....* I don't know who gave this to her. Possibly it was one of our Scottish Sangha? The third text that I inherited is the first 10 lines from a two -page typed text. At the bottom it states that it was *"Transcribed from a lecture of the Jukai ceremony at Mount Shasta Abbey, delivered by Rev Jiya Kennett"*. I do have a tape of Reverend Master reading this and I have asked a few of the monks at Throssel but none of them have recognised it.

**Sad it is, that Life, like a flash, in  
gloom and splendour passes.  
Though its pleasures be for a hundred years,  
'Tis vain and phantasmal as a  
dream on a night of Spring.**

**Earth and Fire, and Water and  
Wind construct our Earthy forms,  
Yet frail they be...  
For, should our breath for a few  
short moments forsake and fail us,**

**These things, as if at one swift bidding,  
all become as nought;  
....and we are no more of this world**

**So, child of Earth, why dost thou  
strive and struggle?  
Why art thou distraught?**

Whenever I return to these lines I am reminded of the fragility of life and the insignificance of the concerns and objects that I attempt to cling on to. I am alive at this moment! I am breathing! What a gift! Miraculous!

The fourth of my Inheritance Texts came from her father several years after he died. I was visiting her brother in America and saw a framed text on the wall. He told me that it had always been on the wall of their father's office. It is titled **'An Irish Blessing'** and simply states:

**Do not resent growing old.  
Many are denied the Privilege.**

Their father died at the age of 94, many years after the death of his eldest child, Sharon, who died at the age of 55.

I carry copies of these four texts wherever I go as they continue to enrich my

life. I am always happy to offer them to others.

In gratitude

*Julian Goodacre*

... The path of love is not a path of comfort,  
it means going forward into the unknown, with  
no guarantees of safety, even though you're afraid.  
Trust is dangerous, but without trust there  
is no hope for love, and love is all we ever have  
to hold against the dark.

"Be satisfied that ye have enough light to  
secure another foothold" - T.S. Eliot

*(The path of love - Sharon's original note in her handwriting)*

Now the golden flower has opened  
how its leaves drink in the light  
feeding from the incandescence  
that is the golden heart of life.

Find figured in a blossom's form  
quintessential glory's flame;  
only look, and you will see,  
all is meant simply to be.

*Jennie Renton*

## *The Scottish Enlightenment, David Hume & Buddhism— A Detective Story!*

**O**ne of the brighter aspects of this time of Covid has been the opportunity for us all to explore our local area more intimately and appreciatively than perhaps we did before. It's certainly been true for me, and I've discovered all kinds of nooks and crannies and interesting walks in and around my home city of Edinburgh.

One such walk follows the theme of the Scottish Enlightenment which happened in the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. It was an astonishing intellectual flourishing covering a wide range of fields including philosophy, history, science, poetry and medicine – even, I recently discovered, the theory and practice of urban fire-fighting. The French philosopher Voltaire wrote at the time: 'We look to Scotland for all our ideas of civilisation.' The period could be characterised as a time of increased tolerance that allowed talented individuals relative freedom to pursue their ideas. It was aided by universal education (Scotland

was the first European country to have this) and the development of mass communication – cheaper books and periodicals.



*David Hume*

A central figure in the Scottish Enlightenment was David Hume, a philosopher who became notorious for his atheist beliefs. The church authorities did what they could to damage his career, but their power was more limited than it had been, and too many people were interested in his ideas. He wrote one of the greatest works in the history of philosophy, '*A Treatise of Human Nature*' and I can remember struggling with it when I was

a student at the very university – Edinburgh – at which Church authorities were successful in preventing Hume from gaining an appointment.

In his *Treatise*, Hume rejected the traditional religious and philosophical accounts of human nature. Instead, he took Newton as a model and announced a new science of the mind, based on observation and experiment. That new science led him to radically new conclusions. He argued that there was no soul, no coherent self, no “I.” “When I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*,” he wrote in the *Treatise*, “I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe any thing but the perception.”

How did Hume arrive at these ideas, so profoundly at odds with the Western philosophy and religion of his day?

In the *Treatise*, he reports that when he first confronted those dizzying doubts about accepted views he was terrified—“affrighted and confounded.” They made him feel like “some strange uncouth monster.”

Since he was a teenager, he’d thought he had glimpsed a new way of thinking and living, and ever since, he’d been trying to work it out and convey it to others in a great book. At 23, the effort was literally driving him mad. His heart raced and his stomach churned. He couldn’t concentrate. Most of all, he just couldn’t get himself to write his book. He turned to the doctors for medical advice and they diagnosed “vapors, weak spirits, and ‘the Disease of the Learned.’” Today, with different terminology but arguably with no more insight, we would probably say he was suffering from anxiety and depression. And yet, somehow, during the next three years, he managed not only to recover but also, remarkably, to write his book.

---

A little under 300 years later, an American academic, Alison Gopnik, was undergoing a personal crisis of her own. A long term admirer of Hume’s work, she turned to him again for solace and, having been newly introduced to Buddhism and meditation, she began to notice an apparent similarity between some ideas in Buddhist philosophy and Hume’s work. This puzzled her: could Hume



*Ippolito Desideri (1684-1733)*

have been exposed to Buddhist thinking? Surely not – in the 1730s, very few people in Western Europe knew anything of Buddhism.

In an extraordinary piece of detective work (which she embarked on to distract herself from the personal difficulties she was experiencing) she discovered that at least one person in Europe in the 1730s not only knew about Buddhism but had studied Buddhist philosophy for years. His name was Ippolito Desideri, and he had been a Jesuit missionary in Tibet. The story of his journey to Tibet is extraordinary. He sailed from Rome to India in

1712, and in 1714 he began walking from

Delhi across the Himalayas to Lhasa—a trek that lasted 18 months. He slept on the ground, in the snow, and struggled with snow blindness and frostbite. At one point he made his way over a rushing river by clinging precariously to a bridge made of two vine ropes. To get through the Ladakh desert, he joined the caravan of a Tartar princess and argued about theology with her each night in her tent.

When he finally arrived in Lhasa, the king and the lamas welcomed him enthusiastically, and suggested that before converting them to Catholicism, it might be a good idea for him to study Buddhism. If he really understood Buddhism, and could convince them that Catholicism was better, then of course they would convert, the King assured him. Desideri accepted the challenge, and spent the next five years

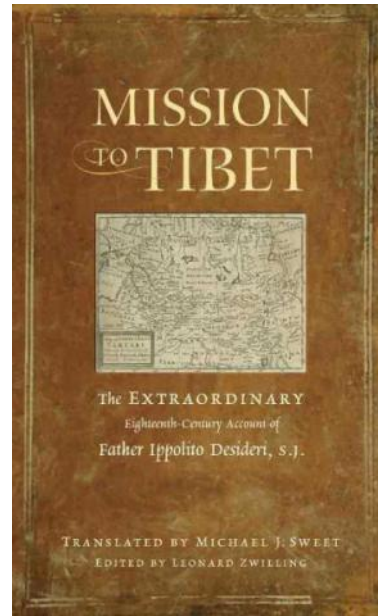


*Vatican stamp with the image of Ippolito Desideri*

in the Buddhist monasteries tucked away in the mountains around Lhasa.

War, however, intervened: the King was murdered, the Chinese invaded and Desideri retreated to an even more remote monastery. His knowledge and understanding of Buddhism deepened.

However, rival missionaries, the Capuchins, claimed Tibet for themselves, and Desideri was ordered to return to Europe. In 1728, just before Hume began the *Treatise*, Desideri finished *his* book, the most complete and accurate European account of Buddhist philosophy to be written until the 20th century. However, his book was unpublished and disappeared into Church archives.



*The Royal College of Jesuits,  
La Flèche*

Alison Gopnik managed to secure a copy of his manuscript, and noticed almost at the end a comment that on his return to Rome from Tibet via France, he had stayed in the Jesuit Royal College in a small French town, La Flèche.

Sitting in a library, she let out a startled cry - because she knew that Hume had written the *Treatise* in La Flèche, 160 miles southwest of Paris, probably because it was cheap to live there. Further patient research revealed that Desideri had spent some days at the College, and it was likely that he subsequently sent them a copy of the manuscript of his travels and studies in Buddhism in Tibet.

Only eight years later, Hume arrived in La Flèche, and one of his letters, she discovered, revealed that he had spent time at the Royal College and had talked

with at least one of those Jesuits at some length. Could it have been Père Dolu, a senior monk who had taken a particular interest in Desideri? It seemed very likely. Hume said that a particular work of reference had been an important influence on the *Treatise*, particularly a section on the philosopher Spinoza. Part of this section refers to ‘oriental philosophers’ who ‘*denied the existence of God and argued for “emptiness.”*’ And this was cross-referenced to another entry about the Buddhist monks of Siam, as described by Jesuit ambassadors – of whom Père Dolu had been one!

Twelve Jesuit fathers had been at La Flèche when Desideri visited and were still there when Hume arrived, but Père Dolu in particular stood out. He had indeed been part of the French embassy to Buddhist Siam; he had met, spent time with and taken a deep interest in Desideri on his return from Tibet; he would have read Desideri’s book; and he was in the Royal College in La Flèche all the time that Hume lived there. It seemed extraordinary that in the 1730s not one but two Europeans had experienced Buddhism firsthand, and both of them had been at the Royal College.

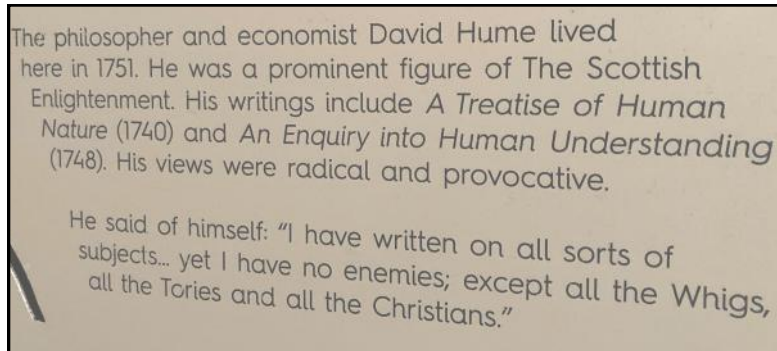
Dolu was an evangelical Catholic, and Hume was a skeptical Protestant, but they had a lot in common—endless curiosity, a love of science and conversation, and, most of all, a sense of humour. Dolu was intelligent, knowledgeable,



*David Hume's house in James Court,  
Edinburgh*

gregarious, and witty, and certainly “of some parts and learning.” He was just the sort of man Hume would have liked. Of course, it’s impossible to know for sure what Hume learned of Buddhism at the Royal College, or whether any of it influenced the *Treatise*. But what an interesting possibility.

As Alison Gopnik points out, all of the characters in this story started out with clear, and clashing, identities—the passionate Italian missionary and the urbane French priest, the Tibetan king and lamas, the Siamese king and monks, the skeptical young Scot.



*An example of Hume's wry sense of humour —*

But in the course of her research and detective work, she learned that they were all much more complicated, unpredictable, and fluid than they appeared at first, even to themselves. Both Hume and the Buddha, she says, would have nodded sagely at that thought. Although Dolu and Desideri went to Siam and Tibet to bring the wisdom of Europe to the Buddhists, they also brought back the wisdom of the Buddhists to Europe. Siam and Tibet changed them more than they changed Siam and Tibet. And his two years at La Flèche undoubtedly changed David Hume.

---

Having read Alison Gopnik's immersive account, and walking the streets that Hume would have walked, standing outside the house he had lived in, I had a strange sensation of the foreshortening of time and distance; the entanglement and intermingling of history and ideas and lives.

I like to think of Hume and Père Dolu, young man and old man, sitting in the library at La Flèche, talking animatedly, exchanging ideas and agreeing – perhaps – that the French saying '*Tout se tient*' holds true: everything is indeed interconnected.

*Willie Grieve*

## *The Four Benefactors*

**S**ince nothing is exactly what we think it is hardly surprising that is also true of even the words in dedications.

The Four Benefactors someone in the Sangha asked about and it has been a question for me over the last few days. On one level the benefactors are:

- The historical Buddha, Shakyamuni, our great teacher and founder, pointing the way;
- The Queen as head of state;
- Our parents;

AND ALL BEINGS. All beings are our benefactors, all people, all living creatures, all the elements and all of the universe.

On the first time of saying, the verse being grateful to the Buddha seemed natural and right. However hearing the Queen as a benefactor raised a lot of surprise and resistance when I first heard the mealtime verse at Throssel. Just to see the reactions and not feed them was why I was at Throssel anyway.....more questions, more to sit with. My parents: another bit of a puzzle. It took me five years to get down to Throssel after coming to the Priory and there were many threads to that but one was my father having been a

minister in the Church of Scotland, and some feeling of disloyalty in not being able to follow the Christian path. AND ALL BEINGS. What a relief. Without any barriers or intellectual thought, just relief was my first strong feeling there.

As time has gone on different questions and understandings have arisen and been helpful and then yet more have taken their place and then faded. Reading Rev. Master Jiyu and coming to a better understanding of the historical importance of not angering the Emperor and using 'code' to speak of that which is greater was very helpful in recognising that the nature of any government is temporary and conditional and how important it is not to take our political freedom for granted.

The gratitude towards my parents has grown stronger over the years. Although as a teenager I found it difficult being the daughter of the manse, that very struggle to come to terms with the things I found difficult to accept in Christianity gave me a deeper gratitude for the selfless and generous way my parents were in the world and for their patience with me. Also with

our own young family and now our grandchildren, how helpful their example was for me in allowing them as much freedom as possible to grow in their own ways.

ALL BEINGS.....That initial relief was a strong clue probably to the 'religious intuition' as Rawdon would say: that we already DO know in a more fundamental sense the way we are so completely one with all beings. That is why training and enlightenment are one and why the teaching that we never were, are, or could be separate from all that is, resonates for us when we are willing to look.

It has taken me a long time to fully accept that the intellectual ideas are only ever pointers to that indefinable essence. The mind still gets busy in

meditation and in daily life tangling things up, comparing the present moment to past ones, to how I would like things to be etc etc.

Just to keep coming back over and over again is so profoundly helpful.

The me has less trouble letting go (sometimes!) and opening up to the present reality. Sometimes glorious, unbounded and light. Sometimes painful and difficult. Knowing the temporary nature of all of it and the greater life that we are all integral with and expressing in our own way. Even (maybe especially?) before we open our mouths it is being fully expressed.

Gratitude indeed to all beings.

*Kathleen Campbell*

## *Secular Mindfulness and Zen Practice*

*This is a summary of a talk I have given on the above topic.*

- ◇ Secular Mindfulness and Zen have the same essence: being fully present in each moment.
- ◇ There are a number of differences between the two. Whilst Zen has the “goal of goallessness”, Mindfulness is usually aimed at relieving a particular form of suffering e.g. recurrent depression, chronic pain, substance misuse, stress.
- ◇ Mindfulness practices are usually guided, with a particular focus such as the breath, the body, sounds or thoughts. Active compassion guidance is not usually a core practice, although sometimes a loving-kindness practice is included to draw out this aspect. Later on in a course, free-floating awareness and silent practices can be included, which begin to look more like zazen.
- ◇ Bowing and scriptures are also not included in Mindfulness. However, poetry is often used towards the end of a practice, which has a parallel role to scriptures.
- ◇ Mindfulness doesn't focus on letting go of the self, as this can sometimes be threatening to people with psychological vulnerabilities.
- ◇ Mindfulness is delivered in an 8 session group format, consisting of weekly sessions of 2 or 2½ hours. Sometimes, one of the later sessions is extended into a full day of silent practice (with guided meditations).
- ◇ There are typically 10-15 people on a course. The group aspect helps to create a community of support, like a sangha.
- ◇ The core guided practices are typically of 30 minutes each. Several types are included in the course: body scan (bringing attention to each part of the body in turn), sitting meditation and mindful movement. This variety of practices enables participants to connect with the practices that feel most helpful to them – which may be a mixture.
- ◇ Participants are asked to commit to doing a practice every day, using CDs

or mp3s. Later in the course participants experiment with practicing without guidance. They can also use the CDs long-term.

- ◇ Once they have established a regular practice, there is a focus on staying with, or accepting, difficulty, and bringing mindfulness to everyday life.
- ◇ There are normally follow-up drop-in sessions available after the course.
- ◇ A key aspect of teaching is to “embody” mindfulness, so teachers have a well-established personal practice as well as specific training in teaching.

*Neil Rothwell*



*Spiders web, Braid Hills, Edinburgh (Willie Grieve)*

## *Golden Retrievals*

*by*

*Mark Doty*

Fetch? Balls and sticks capture my attention  
seconds at a time. Catch? I don't think so.  
Bunny, tumbling leaf, a squirrel who's – oh  
joy – actually scared. Sniff the wind, then

I'm off again: muck, pond, ditch, residue  
of any thrilling dead thing. And you?  
Either you're sunk in the past, half our walk,  
thinking of what you never can bring back,

or else you're off in some fog concerning  
-tomorrow, is that what you call it? My work:  
to unsnare time's warp (and woof!), retrieving,  
my haze-headed friend, you. This shining bark,

a Zen master's bronzy gong, calls you here,  
entirely, now: bow-wow, bow-wow, bow-wow.

*With thanks to Marianna & Eldridge Buultjens who  
offered the poem saying: 'This is a poem which we both  
enjoy as a beautiful reminder, in this season of long walks  
and Christmas bells, that the call to be in the present, is  
always available to us!'*

## *Celebrating life*

I got this message from my niece recently. Her wee boy Lachlan is 5:

'I woke up to Lachlan giving me a party  
in bed this morning. Complete with  
party hats, balloons and hooters.

Life with a 5 year old is really random  
sometimes. '

*Myra Rothwell*



## Gift Aid Declaration

To: **Portobello Buddhist Priory**

Your Name \_\_\_\_\_

Full Home address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Postcode \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Please reclaim tax on my donations as follows (delete as appropriate):**

*I want to Gift Aid any donations I make in the future or have made in the past 4 years.*

*I want to Gift Aid my donation of [amount] given on [date]*

You must pay at least as much income tax or capital gains tax as the amount of tax that we would reclaim on your donations and remember to notify us if this changes.

If this declaration applies to future changes, you are entitled to notify us of the cancellation of your declaration at any time.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_