

—Portobello Buddhist Priory—



A Temple of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives



*Summer sea-swimming:
The joy, fear & exhilaration of the great leap!*

Newsletter & Calendar of Events September-December 2015

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— Welcome to all —

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

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

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

With kindest wishes from Rev Master Favian, Prior

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

- Weekend events at the Priory -

September 2015

Sunday 6th	Renewal of Precepts	11am
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October

Sunday 4th	Renewal of Precepts	11am
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November

Sunday 15th	Festival of the Founder	11am
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December

Sunday 6th	Festival of the Buddha's Enlightenment	11am
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Thursday 31st	New Year Festival	7.30- 10.30pm
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The Priory is open to visitors as well as trainees every day from
6.45am - 9.15pm
except Mondays, Thursday afternoons, and Sunday pm.

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

— *Prior's Notes* —

One of the obstacles to awakening to our interconnected existence seems to be the power of past conditioning to veil the reality of the present. It is perhaps made more complicated by the fact that we humans, like the rest of life, pay attention to possible signs of threat to our survival in the environment and hold them in memory to optimise our future survival.

However as meditation reveals, the basic psychological dynamic of the 'separate sense' of self is based on fear and desire. Through the mistaken identity of a 'separate' self, the world is continually being

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assessed in terms of what I want and don't want from it; so now our biological survival is subsumed into 'me, the self senses' survival. We are often unconscious of this movement, but the sense of dukkha that it generates is only too familiar; where we can feel we are not fully alive, where the past is felt as burdensome, weighing upon us with its limiting demands. Our behaviour tends towards reactivity and automation, rather than that of a living breathing expression of the cosmos.

There is a moving story I heard recently about the Nobel prize winning psychologist Daniel Kahneman. He was a Jewish child in occupied France during World War 2; his parents instilled into him that he must not stay out after curfew and that if he saw any black uniformed men, he was to run away as fast as he could. So on this occasion, caught up in his street games, he suddenly realized it was past curfew and heading home he was suddenly confronted by a tall and menacing figure in black—an SS officer. The boy froze in fear as the man bore down upon him, picked him up and hugged him to his chest, then proceeded to show him a picture of his own small boy, gave Daniel some money and sent him home.

Professor Kahneman remembers the powerful impact this experience had upon him, the thought, “people are complicated”, stayed with him and he went on to dedicate his life to the enquiry into these ‘complicated’ beings.

Our practice doesn’t turn us into memory-denying or risk-taking individuals, but reveals a more profound sense of our lives, open and grounded in the present. We are aware and sensitive to the needs of our individual bodies and minds, but at the same time we are coming to entrust ourselves to a wider sense of Being that enfolds us along with everything else; a sense that “you are not him, he is all of you”. A reality where fear and clinging can transform towards compassionate and wise living.



In July, I was fortunate to have the chance for a two week solitary retreat, here at Throssel. I stayed in a small wooden cabin at the far end of our property, under the trees, which looks out across to the other side of the valley. I sat quietly every day with my cup of tea enjoying the view and watching the sheep grazing and following each other along tracks for no apparent reason, as they are prone to do. There is a corresponding slope of rough grass there, with a path which winds up the hill and curves around to the right, a sandy coloured strip among the rich summer green, a lovely colour contrast. It looked inviting, so I went across for a walk one day, it's not far.

It was such a surprise when I got there, it was so different from my view from across the valley; the path was a deeply rutted clay track, with trickles of water and lying stones and the 'green' was a mix of tall thistles and grasses, patches of nettles, reeds in soggy patches, rocks jutting out and sheep droppings. The sheep could not see each

other as I had assumed, seeing them all spread out across the slope; the undergrowth was too high in many places.

I was quite struck by the experience of just being there; the landscape was real, vivid, full of detail; I couldn't make out where on the slope I was. This brought up a reflection on the two very different views of the same thing. One being right there in the midst of a lot of detail; the other, an outside view, a generalised and limited view.



It seemed to me that being over the other side of the valley was like my life, with all that is involved in that: the immediacy of it all unfolding constantly; thoughts, hopes, fears, reactions, intentions and feelings, all in a complex interaction with everything encountered, and all this along with my processing and interpreting.

Sitting on the Throssel side of the valley with my cup of tea looking across struck me as how I can view others. Being 'outside' I have no

access to the immediacy of all the aspects of their experience: their life, their hopes, fears, wishes, their history, context or issues; what I have is a partial and generalised view, with assumptions and interpretations. Their experience is as much being amidst all the detail of life and as vivid and complex as mine. I may read something in the way the complex inner processing affects another's face, speech, body, behaviour – we can be quite perceptive (as we can also be transparent), but there is much going on that I don't know, and my sense of things may not be accurate.

This opened up some implications about how I can view others – and any other situations I am not currently a part of: situations involving others, events in the news, others' lives. How could I judge or hold to an opinion on anyone else? I will have views, but to see their inaccurate and partial nature shows me that I do not wish to base my thoughts and

consequent actions and speech on them.

There being two such different views of one thing highlighted for me that there are endless viewpoints, all equally valid, which can be—will be actually—quite different from mine. It was not that one view of the valley was right and one wrong, they were both true from the two perspectives. When I came back, the other side of the valley looked as it had before, even though I now knew—it still looked the same. I can only see from where I am and this view is fine, it's what I've got and it can be helpful, no need to judge it, I just need to know that it is just a view and not attach too much to it. Let go and look deeper. When I looked up from treading amongst the thistles and sheep droppings on my walk, I saw I was standing in a beautiful valley.

Rev. Alina

(Rev. Alina is based at Throssel Hole and is one of the Trustees of Portobello Priory)

We are so lightly here

Mamie is surprised to see me, she is happy and my heart is glad.

The bright life she still has within, shines from her pale blue eyes in a flashing sparkle.

Mamie's body is frail, her legs no longer support her small frame, but she sits in her chair, uncomplaining, chattering like a little bird, asking after my family in a voice I know well, but is now a little thin.

The late afternoon sun comes in from beyond the trees and dapples her in warm gold. I watch this silent act of universal compassion and it occurs to me that I want her to remain exactly as she is. Mamie is the last of our mothers and I am not her son. I look away and let the thought go.

We talk together, but mostly I listen to her reminisce, quieter now as she tires. The clock ticks, a moth on the window describes itself in perfect black clarity. There is nowhere to be that is not here, we sit content in this eternal present moment. Mamie is as delicate as a watercolour wash. There is nothing left to be said.

The carer arrives bringing in noise and good humour, checking tablets and talking of dinner and tomorrow. The stillness of the moment is broken, but we remain in the same present, ever changing now, poised for whatever happens, breathing in unison, dependent upon each other, just as we always have been.

It is time to leave and as I bend to kiss her goodbye, I take her hand. So small and the skin soft, almost translucent, just like my own mother when she spoke to me for the last time and I remember what she said. I turn at the door, thinking of my reply – 'I love you too' and the light filtering through Mamie's candyfloss hair fills me with a great sad joy.

David Campbell

Kindness

Before you know what kindness really is
you must lose things,
feel the future dissolve in a moment
like salt in a weakened broth.
What you held in your hand,
what you counted and carefully saved,
all this must go so you know
how desolate the landscape can be
between the regions of kindness.
How you ride and ride
thinking the bus will never stop,
the passengers eating maize and chicken will stare out the window forever.
Before you learn the tender gravity of kindness, you must travel where the
Indian in a white poncho lies dead by the side of the road.
You must see how this could be you,
how he too was someone
who journeyed through the night with plans and the simple breath that kept
him alive.
Before you know kindness as the deepest thing inside, you must know sorrow
as the other deepest thing. You must wake up with sorrow.
You must speak to it till your voice
catches the thread of all sorrows
and you see the size of the cloth.

Then it is only kindness that makes sense anymore,
only kindness that ties your shoes
and sends you out into the day
to mail letters and purchase bread,
only kindness that raises its head
from the crowd of the world to say
it is I you have been looking for,
and then goes with you everywhere
like a shadow or a friend.

Maomi Shibab Nye

(with thanks to Katharine McCullough for the contribution of this poem)

Gardening and training

It struck me quite forcefully coming back to the Priory garden after being away on holiday for nearly 3 weeks that my immediate reaction was; "What a lot of work needs doing."

I could see the long grass of the lawn, the weeds sprouting vigorously, the deadheading of all the flowers that were over etc., etc.

I did not do any of it as it was Friday evening so I had time before Sunday to register that this was a response I chose to feel and maybe I could see it differently? I came round earlyish on Sunday morning intending to just stand in the garden and have a proper look at ALL that was in the garden. Sure enough the grass was still long and the seedheads there and the weeds/wildflowers (depends where they are the name we give them). Also a lot of marjoram flowering with bees busy working on them, some big daisy heads and the last of the foxgloves beside the steps. The myriad colours and shapes of green on the different leaves. A whole rich tapestry, not just the work that I needed to do.



The Priory garden

This seemed to point to how my habitual view of "me and my training" also need a shift in perspective. All the faults and habit tendencies I focus on to the exclusion of the rest of the picture. The bigger tapestry of life which enfolds me and all the doings and beings of life. The need to turn again and again to the fullness of the present moment and drop off all the judgements. Then everything can clarify and the faults (weeds/wildflowers) DO become pointers to what needs our attention in a bigger and kinder way.

One more thought that has often struck me about gardening/training. We plant the seeds or dig over the ground and do

some weeding, but the soil, the sun and rain, the air and wind are all there for us and the amount that we do is very small really. The garden grows by itself just as training goes on with us doing some very small things that we can see need doing. The gardener only becomes the gardener with the help of the garden, we can only do our training with the help of training. Not ever separate.

Kathleen Campbell



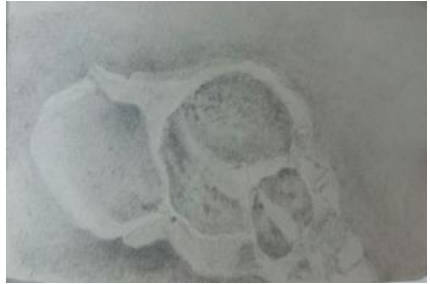
Wonder —

'Ideas are an adaptation with which our minds can contain useful information but in contrast, wonder is an adaptation by which we can sustain awareness of complex, non-reducible wholes... wonder includes the ability to not-know, to not conclude, and to not deny but to enter the world like a juggler who can keep aloft balls, bowling pins and flaming sticks; a state of no-self in balance with the conditions of the situation and therefore free to respond wholeheartedly'.

P. Fleischman

from 'Wonder – Why & When The World Appears Radiant' (pub. Small Batch Books)

Shoreline of the invisible —



With thanks to Katharine
McCullough for these
drawings —

Marriage blessing ceremony



On the 20th June this year, after 40 years of marriage, we had the privilege and joy of celebrating, with the Dundee Sangha, the renewal of our marriage vows. In preparation, Rev. Master Favian had asked us to consider and share what training in a relationship means to us.

The metaphor that suggests itself with respect to our marriage is that of two, unique torrents, brought together by a series of improbable events to form a union that has lasted 40 years. The stream which carried us so powerfully along, from time to time presented significant obstacles which we now see as arising from greed, anger and delusion. Meditation has been a wonderful means of enabling us to identify and tackle issues which before remained as deep undercurrents in our lives. Training in a relationship is like training in any situation, but with the

bonus of having someone, on the spot, who can remind and help, and with whom one can learn.

Rev. Master Favian had prepared a beautiful ceremony for us starting with everyone reciting the Litany of The Great Compassionate One. The introductory words which followed, encapsulate the essence of our renewal of commitment to each other.

'Here are Marianna and Eldridge who are committing each to the other, dedicating their relationship to the highest good. Now they stand before the Buddha asking Him to witness their sincerity of purpose. They are praying deeply to the Three Treasures for Their protection as they commit themselves to live and train together in their search for the Truth through happiness and unhappiness, in pleasure and in pain until the end of life. They offer the merit of their union and all they do to all living beings. Let us pray that the flower of the heart shall bloom in the springtime of Enlightenment and the Light of Buddha purify and harmonise their relationship.'

We each held a lighted candle and after Rev. M. Favian asked us in turn if we took our partner to be our companion for life, and we answered 'I do', we lighted a large candle from our two candles and that was placed on the altar. We then made our personal

statements of commitment, each one vowing to help the other to: 'become all you can be, in your own way, by doing the best that love can do for you, so that you, and all beings, may obtain the truth. I am deeply grateful to be able to make this promise to you'.

After this we all chanted:
*'Buddham Saranam Gacchami,
Dharmam Saranam Gacchami,
Sangham Saranam Gacchami?'*

This chant has special meaning for Eldridge who knew it well during his childhood in Sri Lanka.

We made gassho with entwined hands and Rev. Master Favian bound them together with a rosary saying:
'By the sincerity of your commitment to each other, and your wish to follow the Way of the Buddhas you are now true companions for life. May your life together be blessed and may your love grow into the fullness of Enlightenment.'

After RM Favian removed the rosary we made the following promise:

'We now have the light of Buddha so we will extinguish the light of selfishness. We will make the Buddha's light sanctify our union and we will purify our bodies and minds so that we live the life of the Precepts and help each other to be successful each in their own way. May our every action increase our respect

for life so that the merit of our relationship shall be of benefit to all beings.'

The ceremony ended with all present making the Bhodisattva vow.

We then adjourned for some celebratory cake with our Sangha family!

Eldridge and Marianna Buultjens



Statue of the Buddha in Eldridge & Marianna's garden

In Basho's Footsteps



Matsuo Basho

Following the morning service one Sunday in the second half of August, several of us went down to the Promenade to enjoy a light lunch on the beach – this being probably the first Sunday of the year when that really felt like a good thing to do. Afterwards, we headed off to Leith to an exhibit entitled ‘In Basho’s Footsteps’.

Basho was a 17th-century Japanese poet, known mostly for his haiku, who took up a zazen practice in his late thirties, and ended up living a fairly reclusive life and wandering on foot through Japan. Anya and Pablo, a young artist and poet originating from Russia and Spain, respectively, and now students at the University of Edinburgh, spent three months hiking though Japan last year, visiting places that Basho had visited before them and writing and painting along the way, and organized an exhibit that included both work done in Japan and work inspired by their journey.

Anya spoke of how slowing down to a walking pace awakened a heightened sensitivity to what places can say to us that is often lost when we move faster, and as an example mentioned a moment in their journey when they came to a fork in the road and felt a very strong impulse to go in a particular direction. Along that road they came to a cemetery where a white cat looked at them intently, as if bidding them to enter, and found a Buddhist temple there. The couple who ran it hosted them for a night and then provided them with contacts who shaped much of their further journey and activities in Japan.

I purchased one of Anya's prints, a scene with a crescent moon, thinking of the references in Zen to the moon and the finger pointing at the moon, and Anya said she would be honoured to have it displayed in the Priory.

Temple bells die out.
The fragrant blossoms remain.
A perfect evening!

- Matsuo Basho (1644-1694)

Rick Woodward



Anya Gleizer with sangha members at the exhibition

'Those who do not have the power over the story that dominates their lives - the power to retell it, reexperience it, deconstruct it, joke about it, and change it as times change - truly are powerless because they cannot think new thoughts'

Salman Rushdie



*Thank you to all the contributors to this issue of the Newsletter.
Deadline for next issue is mid-December 2015*





- Events elsewhere in Scotland with the Prior -

October 2015

Friday 30th	Aberfeldy evening retreat	7.30-9pm
Saturday 31st	Dundee morning retreat	10am-1pm
Sunday 1st November	Aberdeen morning retreat	10am-1pm

November

Sunday 8th	Inverness day retreat	10am-4pm
Friday 27th	Aberfeldy evening retreat	7.30-9pm
Saturday 28th	Dundee morning retreat	10am-1pm
Sunday 29th	Aberdeen morning retreat	10am-1pm

For further details please phone :

Aberdeen -	Bob McGraw or Joyce & Gordon Edward	(01330) 824339 (01467) 681525
Aberfeldy -	Robin Baker	(01887) 820339
Dundee -	Elliott Forsyth	(01333) 451788
Highland -	Shooie	(01997) 477378

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

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

MORNING

7.00 Meditation
7.40 Morning service

EVENING

7.30 Meditation
7.55 Walking meditation
8.00 Meditation
8.30 Evening office

Early morning practice

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

7.00am –
8.15am

Evening practice

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

7.30pm –
8.45pm

Introductory afternoons

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

Saturday 5th September, Saturday 10th October, Saturday 14th November, Saturday 6th December

2.30-4pm

Wednesday and Friday evenings

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

7.30pm–9.30pm

Sunday mornings

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

9.30am–
12.30pm

Festival mornings

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

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