

—*Portobello Buddhist Priory*—



A Temple of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives



*Kojo-no-mai (Fuji Cherry) tree in blossom
(with thanks to Graham Jordan)*

Newsletter May—August 2024

**Portobello Buddhist Priory
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Newsletter

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Please note: the Priory website at www.portobellobuddhist.org.uk has an up to date schedule of events at the Priory. Group visits around Scotland will be arranged on a case by case basis by the Prior.

We'll continue coming together for meditation, dharma and ceremony on the Zoom platform each Wednesday evening. We also physically meet in the Priory on Sunday mornings and—currently—on Friday evenings (once per month.)

Again, please consult the Priory website for the most up to date information.

— *Prior's Notes* —

Over the last few weeks, we have been looking at, sitting with, and discussing, the 10 Great Precepts. As a dharma topic, this seems particularly relevant as we were coming up to the time of the 10 precepts retreat, Jukai, where trainees formally declare their wish to become Buddhists.

One of the things that struck me during our engaged discussions was the way we were able to both look to the spiritual depth that the precepts were grounded in and also the practical implications they pointed to, and how this combination supported our sense of sangha refuge.

Zen Buddhist practice has this expression of both the inner life of formal Zazen, which has been called the activity of no-self, which then gives expression through the form of our bodies and minds acting in the world, to our true heart's wish, to 'do that which is good to do'.

Buddhism says that to be awake is to know the emptiness of form, the recognition of impermanence, which reveals our profound inter-connection with all things. Being awake to our interdependence in turn can draw forth a compassionate recognition that existence is a totality, a wholeness of being of which we are an expression: 'To look with the eyes of a Buddha is to see the heart of a Buddha'.

Each precept is grounded in the truth of the emptiness and compassionate expression of form.

And learning to live our lives preceptually, we discover a greater freedom, which is pointed to in the words: 'We live in the world as if in the sky'.

To more fully know and live in this way, an empathetic and compassionate response alone would not be enough, but would need also to be accompanied by a wise discernment. Otherwise, the sympathetic heart can become overburdened with shared suffering and also through subtle attachments to form, we can end up blocking the energy that needs to move through. So the insight of emptiness supports this necessary release.

For instance, the precept: 'Refrain from indulging anger' where anger is so familiar and yet challenging to train with, perhaps because of its visceral power to connect our emotions to a mental story. All our 'fight or flight' buttons can get pressed. To sit zazen with all of this going on, is to sit in faith, trusting ourselves to the open awareness with its fundamental acceptance of the arising conditions. This is to trust that zazen does zazen. Within this is a subtle attention to conditions, the phrase, 'What is this', suggests its attitude of open enquiry. With an increased sense of spaciousness, the seeming solidity of 'my' self and 'my' anger, can shift and loosen. Something of the emptiness of form may shine through, not as a physical light but as a 'knowing' - the knowledge of the fundamental sufficiency of this moment being revealed. Doing the 'right thing' as best we can see it, despite its difficulties, can at the same time come with a sense of wellbeing.

This inner work feeds a more compassionate and wise response to the practical situation. Fundamentally we refrain from reacting and instead respond from a deeper place, guided by what seems preceptually good to do. This doesn't have to mean we don't respond vigorously when, for instance someone is acting in a harmful way, or that we can't strongly speak out against a false allegation. But our ability to respond from a sense of wholeness and connection rather than lack and separation, restrains the karmic sequence of angry thoughts leading to angry or even hateful actions, which, when indulged, powers the wheel of dukkha in our world.

Training with the Precepts is challenging, we know, but as we go on, perhaps we can come to see our lives as less about 'me' although we are involved, and more about a giving space to the true nature, which requires us to live more deeply in faith and humility.



Water

I have been working in water engineering in some way or another for most of my working life. One thing that has struck me is how little many of us know about where our water comes from. Turn the tap on and it's there, it flows through our daily life, appears and disappears and is almost always available. True, once in a while it may be off in our neighbourhood for repairs but for the most part it's there and, my guess is, most of us take that for granted. About a decade or so ago Ireland started charging its population for the supply of water, the last country in Europe to do so. At the time there were many protests. In Ireland, like Scotland, water appears abundant, often over-abundant. People complained about why should they pay for something that falls free of charge from the sky. This idea about water is, in my experience, not at all unusual.

There again this is not always the case. I've worked in less developed countries, often in post-war reconstruction work, mainly in the Balkans and eastern Europe, where people have learned that water cannot be taken for granted. Lack of investment combined with war has left systems they took for granted broken and unreliable, and even if it does flow it may not be safe to drink. In those places I noticed people seemed to know where their water came from. They wake up to the lack or unreliability of their supply and take a real interest. They get to know, one way or another, which river or lake feeds their reservoir. Where it's treated to make it potable. And how it travels to their town or city. They learn the names of these places, it becomes the small talk of cafes and barbers shops in a way that it isn't here.

So, where do we get our water from in Edinburgh? The answer, as you might expect in a developed country, is complex and depends which part of Edinburgh and the Lothians you live in, but to keep it simple most comes from four large reservoirs. Three of these are located in the head waters of the River Tweed; the Megget, Fruid and Talla reservoirs, fifty or so kilometres from Ed-

inburgh in the Southern Uplands. The fourth reservoir, which mostly supplies Midlothian and the eastern part of the city is Gladhouse Reservoir nestled below the Lammermuir Hills south of Haddington.

The Talla scheme is a masterpiece of late 19th century civil engineering. It was first developed at the turn of the century when a large dam was constructed in the Talla valley and a 50 kilometre long concrete aqueduct was built all the way to Edinburgh, weaving its way through a series of tunnels under the hills and piped aqueducts across valleys. The whole project was so large that a dedicated railway was built to move labour and materials to the dam and work sites along the route: remains of this can still be seen today. The Fruid Reservoir, close to Talla, was completed in 1968 to supplement the supply available to the Talla system.

Water arrives entirely by gravity flow for filtration near Edinburgh. It used to be received at Fairmilehead but the old waterworks there, built in the 1910's, was replaced in 2012 by a state-of-the-art new treatment works located further out of Edinburgh, at Glencorse near Penicuik. The aqueduct is still in use, of course, just as it was in 1910, a hidden gem of late Victorian engineering. It is worth noting that the two smaller reservoirs in the Pentland Hills at Glencorse, which many Edinburgh residents may be familiar with, are not where we normally get our water from as they are too small for Edinburgh's needs and are used only in emergencies, for example if the Talla aqueduct requires repair.

With the inevitable growth of Edinburgh in the post-war period another equally impressive and major scheme was developed to provide the additional water the city demanded: this is the Megget Reservoir, in the neighbouring valley to Talla. It was opened in 1983, consisting of another large dam on the Yarrow Water, a tributary of the Tweed, and a 45 kilometre steel pipe aqueduct going not only to the Glencorse works but also to Gladhouse Reservoir and, via a pipe over the Pentland Hills, to the Marchbank treatment works located above Balerno. A wonderful film called "A Different Valley" about the Megget valley scheme can be found on the National Library of Scotland website: [Megget Valley film](#) -

Back to the future: 1979-1989 - National Library Scotland (nls.uk). https://movingimage.nls.uk/film/5780?search_term=Megget&search_join_type=AND&search_fuzzy=yes

The combined Talla and Megget system supplies over 170 million litres of water every day to the capital – imagine how that would look if it arrived in plastic bottles, not via an aqueduct! Fortunately, it arrives through pipes, flowing into progressively smaller pipes spreading out like the branches of a tree from trunk to twigs, taking water to every corner of our city and surrounding area. The very veins of our city.

I hear people say water is life. I think this is simplistic; life is more than water, just as we are more than the blood in our veins, but it is nonetheless true that without this continuous flowing, life would be very difficult, if not impossible for many of us. As it is for many in less fortunate situations around the world. Knowing the names of where it comes from, and appreciating the distance our water travels is part of not taking it for granted. We say the five thoughts before we start to eat: I think the first thought, *we must think deeply of the ways and means by which our food has come*, applies especially and equally to every drop of water we drink, or wash with or flush. And appreciating where and how our water gets to us is part of this thinking deeply, a small bow of gratitude for being part of this ever-flowing cycle of life in which water is the blood in life's veins.

Tim Westmoreland



Evening Star

In a familiar room in winter,
Shuttered against the cold,
Three old men sit together
Around a table, bathed warmly
In the light of friendship.

One man sends the sweet notes
Of a singing bowl spinning upward,
Gently disturbing the silence,
As we slowly raise our hands
In adoration to the triple treasure.

The low chanted litany moves
Among the men like Kanzeon,
Embracing them in a deep mystery.
And for a moment we are held
Inexplicably, in uncertain faith.

At the door the Prior waves
Goodnight. The street lamp,
Like a star illuminates his face
As we close the gate in gratitude.
Two old men homeward bound.

David Campbell

Memorial Plaques

Some years ago, I made a memorial plaque for Rawdon Goodier, to sit at the Founder's Shrine in Portobello Priory.

Rawdon had been instrumental in the purchase of the property that houses the Priory and a constant member of the sangha there for the rest of his life. He is fondly remembered by all who knew him. The design of the plaque came from Rev. Favian, and is made from off-cuts of Scottish oak glued together. The lettering is made with a small u-shaped gouge and then highlighted with oil paint. The finish was a wax.



Recently I was asked by a sangha member to make another plaque as a memorial to his parents; which now sits on his meditation shelf.

Thinking that others may wish one, I used the occasion to make several of them, and they are available to sangha members of Portobello Priory and Throssel Hole. I am suggesting a donation, say to Throssel Hole or Portobello Priory or Palestine Medical Aid or other.

Thanking you in anticipation...

Ian McPhail

(Ian can be contacted at itmcpmail@hotmail.co.uk)

Gratitude

The famous 19th century psychologist **William James** observed that feeling is what gives valence and meaning to experience — without it, ‘no one portion of the universe would then have importance beyond another; and the whole collection of its things and series of its events would be without significance, character, expression, or perspective.’ He saw love as ‘the most familiar and extreme example of this fact’, but gratitude would have counted highly too.

At a recent EASE course* I was struck by a story that one of the participants told.

The participant described how she cares for her mother and father at their home for one in every four weeks, 24 hours per day. Both are in their mid-90s; and suffering from dementia. Her father is completely blind. They both require a high level of care. However, she said, one of the things that greatly helps is that her mother finds something to be grateful for each day — where they go for a short walk, for example; or for birdsong; or for the care that her daughter provides.

Her mother had been a minister of the church; and she believes that her mother had over her life built this practice of gratitude; and that it was now deeply engrained in her.

I was struck both by the positive effect that her mother’s daily expression of gratitude had on her as a carer; and by the rewards that came from a conscious, long-term, positive practice such as this, even at a very advanced age. We can think of other positive practices which are so worthwhile developing as habits, most obviously — as Buddhists — meditation. And there are others which we intuitively recognise as important, such as the building and maintaining of relationships.

But gratitude seems a particularly important habit to build. Indeed the Roman statesman and philosopher, Cicero, said that it ‘was not only the greatest of the virtues, but the parent of all the others’, and RM Daizui, previously Head of our Order, saw it as a real sign of the depth of our training.

And gratitude is always within reach: I remember RM Favian in one of his ‘Notes’ not too long ago writing; ‘To have your health, even sort of, to have

friends, even only a few, to have hobbies or interests, and the freedom to pursue them. To have spent this day free from some terrifying encounter with chaos, is to be blessed. Just take a moment to look around you and see how lucky you are.'

Willie Grieve



* EASE (End of Life Aid Skills) is funded by the Scottish Government to help to make Scotland **'a place where people help each other through the difficult times that can come with death, dying, loss and care'** and the purpose is to **'enable people to be more comfortable and confident supporting family and community members with issues they face during dying, death and bereavement.'**

The courses are free and consist of 4 x 2-hour training sessions. You can find details of the course content & aims [here](#).

As a volunteer facilitator, I'd be willing to run a course (along with a co-facilitator) for sangha members online via Zoom during the autumn or winter months. They usually run over 4 weeks, with one 2-hour session per week, usually on the same night of the week. A little reading or watching of video material at home is also involved. Places are limited to about 8 people and funding conditions mean that only people resident in Scotland are eligible to attend.

If you're interested in doing the course, please let me know at willie.grieve@gmail.com If there are enough sangha members interested, we'll then start looking for suitable dates.

Moments Along The Path

I often consider those special, seemingly minimal, moments in my life which in some ways have nudged me towards the Path that I am now following. The Path which, years later, now involves me willingly sitting on a stool, facing the wall. Those little glimmers and imperceptible stirrings in my past that led to the realisation that there had been something missing in my life. In my thirties I took on new responsibilities. Within only a few years I became self-employed, married, had a mortgage, and became a father. Grown-up stuff! There were lots of things I could choose to worry about, and I certainly did! I never took any time to consider that this was a *choice*. Worry was my mindset and I assumed that was just the way it was.

I remember the actual moment, many years ago, in a conversation with our friend Eve, that I had an important glimpse that there might be a possibility that things could be different. Eve has a sitting practice, and we were on a bramble picking trip on an overgrown old railway track in East Lothian. As we picked brambles, I was talking to her about my worries and saying that it must be *such a relief* when one is about to die to be able to feel all one's cares and worries slip away. And she immediately replied, with considerable feeling, that she didn't want to have to wait *until she was dying* to let go of her worries!

Something resonated in my mind. Just a faint glimpse of that *something*. But at that time, I didn't have any notion of a spiritual practice and I didn't know what to do with that *something*. But it certainly remained within me and was another step on the Path that has led me to be sitting on a stool, facing the wall.

Thank you, Eve.

Julian Goodacre

All you have to do is cease from erudition, withdraw within and reflect upon yourself. Should you be able to cast off body and mind naturally, the Buddha Mind will immediately manifest itself; if you want to find it quickly, you must start at once.

(Extract from Rules for Meditation)

Staying in the present –

We are visiting a dear friend who had a severe stroke a couple of months ago.

Walking unsteadily with the aid of a Zimmer frame, his speech is quite jumbled up, sometimes quite hard to understand, or appears nonsensical, and he struggles to reconnect with the damaged part of his brain.

His frustration is quite painful to bear, both for him and for me as an observer and friend.

I remember the bright, sharp, and incisive person that he was, probably still is, but now locked in behind an invisible grille.

This is sad to see and experience, but is a strong lesson in acceptance, change, and the importance of being in the present, however uncomfortable and distressing that might be.

In gassho,

Fedor Bunge

What we do with Dharma –

I have found that something happens when one can sit as matters arise at first without a noise, a frown or a verbal response. This is difficult enough when sitting but in everyday life it is very uncommon. Yet when it happens it feels as though something has moved

And then I find that I must let that be, rather than thinking, “That’s how to do it!” because then I’m back to gaming the system, to thinking that there’s a trick, a knack to this.

Which in turn puts me in mind of an Enid Blyton Noddy story that I remember reading from an annual to our children 25 to 30 years ago. I understand that

there is much about Noddy that is considered problematic these days but there are a couple of aspects to this particular story that have stuck with me:

In summary, Noddy has to go on a series of errands but gets it wrong each time. The first time he has to fetch a fish from the fishmongers but it slips out of his hands. So he's told that he should have brought it back wrapped in newspaper. So when he's told to fetch a cat, he tries to bring it back wrapped in newspaper. You can imagine the results. And so it goes on with each task that he is given, using the previous piece of advice, which cannot apply to the next circumstance arising.

So it is with Dharma and with life. You listen to the Dharma but it cannot be used to try and win at life and you respond to the circumstances as they arise, always anew.

Alasdair Hosking

Jukai 2024

It is hard to believe that it is now 20 years since I first went down to **Throssel for Jukai** and took the Precepts. Time does fly faster than an arrow. Although sometimes it slows right down and expands too.

This year being the 20th anniversary, it felt important to go again to reconnect with that original intention. The various ceremonies are different from those at other times and express the teaching in extremely helpful ways. We have Kaisan Jokin to thank for making the teaching come alive in the singing of the scriptures, the ceremonies and also starting Buddhist funerals for peasants as I learned this week.

There were 11 lay trainees taking the Precepts for the first time and as a group they seemed particularly serious and settled from the word go. Obviously the first few days are challenging for everyone and yet their deep wish to train really shone through. There were also 11 trainees who had taken the Precepts before, returning to deepen their practice. Everyone worked together well and even though the schedule is tough most people managed it, wishing to help the kind and dedicated monastic community to do the work involved.

On Tuesday the ceremony was for Lay Ordination with the new trainees committing to keeping the Precepts. That heartfelt wish to live from our deepest nature.

On Wednesday it was Sange Day and the cleaning up of things outer and inner. So the instructions are to physically do the temple cleaning, looking in detail at all the bits that might usually get overlooked. A metaphorical and actual looking at those habits of mind which also can be glossed over in the rush and swirl of everyday life.

For myself there seemed to be a recognition that somehow my projections and blind spots were more deeply connected than I had realised. Also because we were doing so much formal meditation and the heart-mind was open and still, then when old knee jerk reactions came up they were seen with a clarity that knew they had to be really looked at more deeply . There was later on an understanding of how much old habits and attitudes could distort our deep wish for compassion towards all beings.

Letting go, letting go, letting go - - - so easy to say and yet sometimes how obstinately we cling to old ideas and notions. Then an upwelling of deep gratitude for the help and kindness of the monks and the other trainees all working on their own particular everyday koans.

On the faces and in the physical postures of the other trainees there was the opening and release of the old patterns. For some there were rocky patches and yet the momentum of the group hopefully helped them on their journey. There were very helpful teachings from Rev. M. Berwyn and Rev. M. Jishin. There was spiritual counselling available from the monks. There was the visible charity and tenderness of the whole monastic community supporting us all. That beneficence of silence helping everyone. A brightening of faces and a loosening of bonds.

These words as always are only pointing to that actual lived reality. I will not try to give more details about the ceremonies, they are to be lived through and experienced.

Deep bows in gratitude.

Kathleen Campbell

Gift Aid Declaration

To: **Portobello Buddhist Priory**

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Full Home address _____

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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.

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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 _____