

—Portobello Buddhist Priory—



A Temple of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives



*Looking north from Cove across Loch Ewe
(photo courtesy of Shooie)*

Calendar of Events

January-April 2013

Portobello Buddhist Priory
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website: www.portobellobuddhist.org.uk

— Welcome to all —

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

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

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

With kindest wishes from Rev Favian, Prior

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

- Weekend events at the Priory -

January 2013

Sunday 6th	Renewal of Precepts	11am
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February

Sunday 10th	Renewal of Precepts	11am
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March

Sunday 10th	Renewal of Precepts	11am
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April

Sunday 28th	Festival of the Buddha's Birth	11am
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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* —

A gardener told me that new plants need plenty of water but as they begin to bed in, watering should decrease on the surface so the plant roots are encouraged to dig deeper into the earth for a more consistent source and a stronger connection. The very surface dryness triggers this deepening response.

Over time, we can experience a similar dryness in our training, when our practice seems un-inviting, drained of vitality and nourishment. Perhaps we can also describe this as when the on-going attempt of the self to 'get something' out of it starts to loosen its grip, and the old compensations lose their appeal.

It's important we don't settle for a story of doubt in the validity of our practice at this point. We can patiently abide in trust, so our roots can go deeper, and a maturing and simplifying can take place.

This can be supported by retreat time, a seeking solitude and taking refuge. Our sitting can take on a quieter aspect, as the mind's attempts to 'know' and 'track' its progress is let go of, and the 'just being' connects us to and excavates more deeply the present moment. To the thinking mind this 'unknowing place' seems to offer no reward or affirmation for 'me' and yet as Dogen points out, this solitude and letting go reveals our solidarity with existence itself.

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Our Winter season also resonates with this description: the withdrawal of light and heat, that drives us indoors to a more interior way of things and yet, at its darkest time, causes us to celebrate our bonds of affection and our wish to renew for the coming year.

Innocent non-duality

Rev. Favian has been giving me lots of encouragement to write something about

Niven. He is our grandson who is now 3 and a half months old.

As all grandparents tend to do I bring him up a lot in conversation, usually saying something about him being the most amazing and wonderful baby that ever was, and that being a grand parent is one of the best things that has ever happened.

Many people who talked to me about grandparenthood had said similar things, but like many/most things you have to really have the experience to fully understand what someone is talking about. Unbounded joy. Deep gratitude. A sense of the mysterious and miraculous nature that allows such an amazing being to come into existence.

Niven gives joy to so many people completely effortlessly, just by being himself. He has no measuring sticks so we are allowed to throw away ours. We can walk down the road singing to him

in complete freedom. We can make silly faces and make nonsense noises and people understand. "Oh, it's a baby." Anyone who stops to look always finds something kind to say; babies often bring out the best in people that you hardly know.

At family gatherings he is like a magnet for people and there have been times in groups of normally extremely talkative people when everyone is totally silent and just looking at him. He connects us back to a simpler way of being, one that we all recognize although we may not be able to express what it is.

Something like his alert and open gaze at all of life going on round him is so refreshing and appealing. Once his basic needs are met he is content, relaxed and alert. He sees everything fresh and has no preconceptions. He is happy with nothing special, a bell or a rustling paper bag is just as interesting as the most expensive toy. AND he can be hard work: just changed his clothes and he is sick on them. Put on a clean



Niven

nappy and he does a poo.....any parent or grandparent could write the list.

He absorbs and develops so quickly too. Already he has gone from being tiny and a bit floppy to holding his head up and being able to follow the movement of something across his line of vision. He can reach out and hold something and bring it up to his mouth. He has the widest and most engaging smile and is beginning to laugh. He can make an increasing

range of noises and every day seems more alert and responsive and he just does it all quite naturally. How amazing is that? If we were learning and changing at the rate he does we would all be supergeniuses.

That is just by way of being a thumbnail sketch of how wonderful Niven is. Although even if I were to write reams and reams about the experience of being with Niven it does no more than give you a hint of the reality.

Just as reams and reams have been

written about meditation, we say it is only the finger pointing at the moon. The actual direct experience itself is what matters. Dropping all ideas and directly responding to Niven and what he seems to need RIGHT NOW. A crying baby has a power to disturb and to make you want to attend to its needs IMMEDIATELY.

Just so in meditation it is the direct experience of this moment which is the important thing. Dropping off all

our ideas and opening up to the immediate present. What is this?

Impossible to explain properly . Constantly changing and yet vividly always now. Even the difficulties we encounter in meditation are like Niven crying.....Train as if your hair were on fire. Just look to see what it really IS .

The mind of the present moment. Niven is absolutely in it effortlessly. He reminds us of our own natural being before we got so cluttered up

with things that we must have or must avoid. Just the natural mind. Easy to say and hard to practise.....Just let go into the present.

AND just as people who are grandparents will recognize something of what I am trying to express, so will people who meditate. Even though it cannot be completely expressed we can directly know the mind of meditation.

Kathleen Campbell



Storytelling —

Forehead pressed to the cold window on an early morning train North, I watch the disconnected sights flash in the darkness: momentary streetlights changing formation, a white van in a square of brightness, a McDonald's sign. As the train slows there is a warehouse and a desolate lamp lit forecourt, a huddle of small lorries parked up there for the night. I raise a hand to block out my reflection and see only the lit objects and the dark. I am only this breathing, only the sound of the wheels, only the warmth of takeaway coffee against palm: I am only this huddled form leaning into the glass.

Today I want to give up on myself and be only the seeing. Just back from a festival weekend at Throssel and feeling inspired, I want to let drop the stories I tell myself about my life and get on with living it. I try too hard and want too much – to be my best self, to be seen, to be loved. I keep editing the story – elaborating, fabricating, interpreting, analysing – and I reread the ro-

mances and the horror stories again and again until the pages wear thin.

Now I want to be here and to see what passes beyond the window. But my brain is peopled with stories. They slide and dodge about, darting away with ragamuffin ease when I face them, only to crawl out again when my back is turned. Already I am blind to the real landscape. Already this morning I am more outside myself than in, and turning the camera lens back on myself. Here is this woman dressed for work, the collar of her coat turned up against the cold of the carriage, her hair unbrushed. The thing that observes, this cold eye, does not let her rest even in these private moments before the day opens. It sees, in the lean of her, this wish to be present, and makes even that into a story.

Why do I do this? If I'm honest, I don't want to let go of being special. I don't want to be ordinary. I rewind and replay my best moments, fret over the worst, and try constantly to fix myself. I look at myself from outside to see who other people think I am, as if I could know myself that way. I am always trying to make something of myself, something that hangs together, so that I can, finally, relax.

Phew. It doesn't work. I do know that. But this knowledge doesn't seem to stop me. There is such momentum to this story that sometimes I don't know how to give it a rest. I worry that if I'm just ordinary then I will have wasted my life. In looking for meaning, I believe I have to do something extraordinary in order for my life to count.

In a talk after the festival at Throssel last weekend, I heard Rev Berwyn say that the other side of this need to be special is self criticism, and that both things are really just pride – believing this self to be better than other selves. I'd never thought of pride as a problem of mine, but when he talked about it, it hit home. I do want to be better than others. And yet I want others to be better than me so that I can rely on them, rely on their judgements of me. Basically I want to know how I'm doing. It looks pretty stupid now I see it in black and white.

As the train rushes on, the shutter of the dark opens each time on a different sight. It's like having to keep starting again. This reminds me that we need some stories to give our lives a sense of continuity and in order to func-

tion. I don't need to put my hands to my eyes to blinker the past and the future. I don't need to forget my history or stop making plans. It is specifically this story of personal specialness (extra wonderful, extra terrible) that seems to get in the way of seeing clearly.

How would my life change if I could believe that being as I am, not so good, not so bad, could be enough? How would life change if I could say 'enough' with these stories and deeply see that what is vital about me is also present in every other human being I meet?

"You have all the vital attributes of a human being," Dogen says, in his *Rules for Meditation*. I suppose it's meant to be encouraging, but every time I hear it I think, 'thanks very much'. Imagine being on a date, gazing into the eyes of your lover across the restaurant table and saying, "what I love about you, darling, is that you have all the vital attributes of a human being". You wouldn't get very far with a line like that.

And yet I can feel that being an ordinary human being, loving other ordinary human beings, is where it's at. The extent to which the stories of special selves are out of the equation is the extent to which I'm available to respond to others as they are. Approaching life this way feels like giving up on all sorts of dreams and my habitual thoughts dig in their heels.

But I don't really have a choice and I know that in letting go of these stories, nothing is lost.

Sarah Whiteside



Cultivating Gratitude

Gratitude is an innate aspect of Buddha nature and it is good to cultivate it.
(Rev. Master Daishin Morgan, "Sitting Buddha")

This quote seems to come up in my mind quite often.

At first sight, the possibility that gratitude can be cultivated seems distinct from the teaching that enlightenment and training are not separate. Cultivation can imply a process involving time, e.g. growing or moving from small to big, yet in Zazen we let go of time. Is it, then, a skilful means within training?

There have been times when I have felt that I was missing something with gratitude. I continued to train but I have rarely had a great sense of gratitude spontaneously welling up in me. I think what I was doing was regarding gratitude as a feeling whereas it is much more than this.

When we look more closely at the process of cultivation, it appears as a series of individual steps, with growth/movement from one state to another being a by-product of those steps. To take a concrete example, the gardener takes a series of actions to grow a plant. They acquire the plant, then plant it, then perhaps provide fertiliser and carry out maintenance

tasks like pruning and watering when necessary. The growth, or movement, then happens of itself, outside the direct control of the gardener. The gardener has simply provided the most favourable conditions for this.

This sense of providing the right conditions in the moment feels relevant to the cultivation of gratitude. We can ask "what have I to be grateful for right now?" For me, this is less like a verbalised question and more seeing things from a certain angle. Interestingly, this can be particularly helpful when there are difficulties, times when it could appear that there is little to be grateful for. During a difficult time, say a loss, there is naturally an emotional reaction. As emotions are inherently unstable, these feelings inevitably wax and wane, yet we can label our experience as being one thing: "I am grieving" or "I am lonely". These may be true at one level, but cultivating gratitude can open up the momentary experience beyond what appeared to be its boundaries.

So what have we to be grateful for?

For most of us, there are many people who are in much more difficult circumstances than ourselves and I find it helpful to bear this in mind. Perhaps more fundamental is the simple fact that we are here, and, through knowing about the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, have the ability to approach *all* aspects of our life in

a way that is meaningful and fulfilling.

In this way, cultivating gratitude seems less like a skilful means and more a pointer into the heart of life.

Neil Rothwell



First snow of winter sweeping across the Table of Lorn, Morvern, West Highlands

On Seeing a Humble Bumble-Bee —

On a day of deep sorrow and woe,
I stepped into my garden,
As I so often do, looking for.....
Solace and some consolation.

AS I look, I see you before me,
You are working frantically,
As you always seem to do,
Looking after your hungry brood.

I Addressed you saying,

“YOU are blissfully unaware of me”,
Therefore, you do not know of my tears,
My outpouring of grief and pain.

So I say “Oh you Humble Bumble,
Seeking nectar from flower to flower,”
YOU change me in that instant,
I am completely again just one piece of creation.

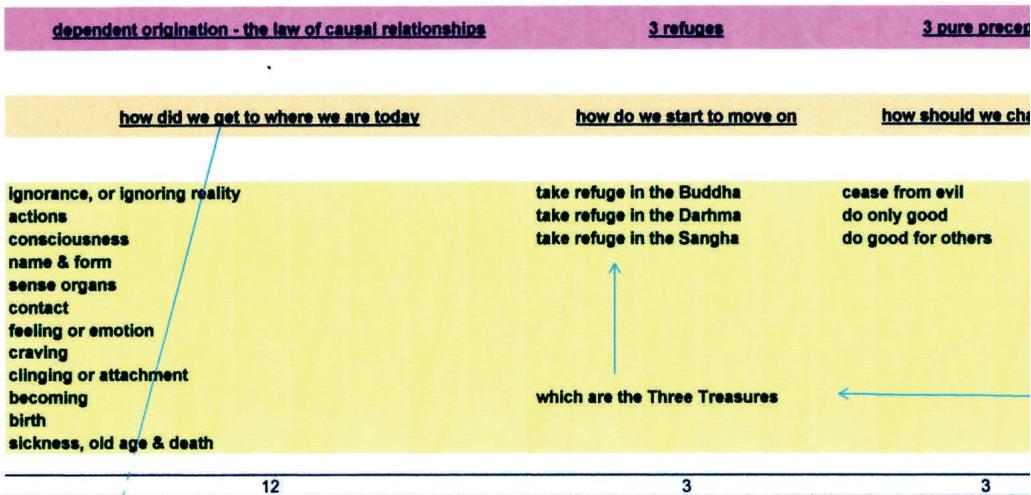
Then off you flew, out over our walls,
Returning who knows where,
With your yellow message baskets,
One on each leg.

John Dickson

Buddhist toolbox —

(Gordon Edwards explains: I call this my "Buddhist Toolbox" which I sometimes give to people at my yoga class who might be interested in some aspects of Buddhism. You will note that there are 36 line items which times 3 = 108. This can be used with a 108 bead rosary - you memorise the 36 items, repeat 3 times, and then you will reach the last bead. It requires concentration and focus so it is great for clearing busyness from the mind and is a good prelude (for me anyway) to sitting.)

Buddhist Toolbox



because of varying degrees of:

greed - hatred - delusion or
 acquiring - eliminating - becoming or
 likes - dislikes - ideals or
 wanting - aversion - concepts

May xx be happy
 May xx be peaceful
 May xx be free from suffering

refrain from killing
 refrain from stealing
 refrain from coveting
 refrain from lying
 refrain from deluding others
 refrain from speaking against others
 refrain from being proud of yourself and devaluing others
 refrain from being mean with your dharma and wealth
 refrain from anger
 refrain from defaming the 3 Treasures

right understanding
 right thought
 right speech
 right action
 right livelihood
 right effort
 right mindfulness *
 right meditation - zazen

* or every moment meditation

 10

8

36

XX = Me, My Family, My Friends, People I Don't Like, All Beings

fering

N.B. The reproduction of Gordon's 'toolbox' is not of the highest quality, due to the editor's technical shortcomings! If anyone would like to receive the original version as an Excel file, please email me at willie.grieve@gmail.com.

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 Shihab Nye



*Thank you to all the contributors to this issue of the Newsletter.
Deadline for next issue is mid-April 2013.*





- Events elsewhere in Scotland with the Prior -

February 2013

Friday 22nd	Aberfeldy group evening	7.30-9pm
Saturday 23rd	Dundee group morning	10am-1pm
Sunday 24th	Aberdeen Morning Retreat	10am-1pm

March

Friday 29th	Aberfeldy group evening	7.30-9pm
Saturday 30th	Dundee group morning	10am-1pm
Sunday 31st	Aberdeen Morning Retreat	10am-1pm

April

Friday 19th	Aberfeldy group evening	7.30-9pm
Saturday 20th	Dundee group morning	10am-1pm
Sunday 21st	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 -	Calum Finlay	(01463) 870331

— 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 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 January 5th (NB first Saturday), 9th February, 9th March, 14th April.

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 Favian Straughan*