

—Portobello Buddhist Priory—



A Temple of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives



*Sangha members at the Buddha's Enlightenment Ceremony
Portobello Priory, 3rd December 2017*

Newsletter & Calendar of Events January-April 2018

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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 -

January 2018

Sunday 7th Renewal of Precepts 11am

February

Sunday 4th Renewal of Precepts 11am

March

Sunday 4th Renewal of Precepts 11am

April

Sunday 1st Festival of Great Master Dogen 11am

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 —

I was struck while listening to both Rev. Master Daizui's and R.M. Daishin's talks how they emphasise the role of training with fear in our practice.

R.M. Daizui in 'What seems important now' states:

'Of all the hindrances listed in Buddhist Scripture, why do I single out fear? It is because fear seems somehow involved in all of the others and appears to be more basic...'

R.M. Daishin in 'The illusion of a persisting self' says:

'We can experience this fear in Zazen. We may feel we have lost all sense of ourselves; that we are lost in a featureless and terrible place. That is not the experience of Emptiness. That is an experience of the fear of Emptiness.'

For me the sense-of-self is never stronger or more clearly outlined than when gripped by fear. We can be present, seemingly living and accepting the moment as it comes and suddenly be caught in the arising of fear. Then the moment becomes divided between the 'yes' of being present and the 'no' of flight. The power of fear seems partly due to its engaging of the body and is therefore difficult to separate from its accompanying mental narrative. So fear can take us out of the present moment because Now is believed to be dangerous and threatening. The mind can instinctively project into a future where safety may be found; while the body's adrenaline rush and heightened arousal support the move in distancing us from the here and now.

Biologically, of course, fear is a protective mecha-

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nism, but it can become much more than its evolutionary role. We can learn to be afraid of any emotion or mind state if anxiety is associated with its arising. For example in the past we may have acted unskillfully with anger, and so when it comes up now we are afraid it will get out of control, and so now we have the double effect of anger and fear. Or we may have had a difficult time with depression, and so fear lurks behind its present arising, complicating its appearance and our reactions.

It is as though fear equates the sense-of-self with the organism and arises when either is felt threatened, so to step out of the deception of a separate self feels like a hostile act. R.M. Daishin points to how our spiritual practice tampers directly with this deception. So fear can accompany the experience of Now because Now begins to melt boundaries and assumed separations. An existential crisis can ensue: the terror of non-being.

Realising when fear is not the fundamental truth of the moment and is in fact a projected reality composed of a strong physical reaction coupled to a mental narrative, can help us navigate its waters. In spiritual practice we learn to sit in faith, turning towards the deeper call of our being, with the ‘what is this’ posture of *Zazen*. This commitment can produce a profound acceptance and stability to stay with the present and its arising, come what may. It can now be recognised that to make anything real out of this fear throws us back into believing the thoughts and emotions of a separate entity. To truly sit without adding or rejecting anything begins to show us the emptiness of fear and brings it into the Now where it cannot sustain a self and can therefore dissolve.

Finally to quote R.M. Daishin:

‘To know true emptiness is to know nothing is lacking; that the whole world is ungraspably full and overflowing.’



The Vessel and its Contents —

(This is the transcription of a talk given by Rev. Master Haryo, the Head of our Order, at a recent lay ministers' retreat. We are grateful to him for giving permission for it to appear in this Newsletter.)

Would someone get me some water, please? (A glass of water is brought). Hmm..I asked for just water, not a glass as well. Please give me just the water— in my hand. (*Water is poured into RM Haryo's open hand, spilling onto the floor*). Oh dear, we are losing most of it, let me give you some back. (*Most is gone, there is little to pass back. After a quick cleaning up, the talk continues —*)

Now that I've got your attention, the point I was trying to make is that even the purest of water needs a vessel to transport it. I've often heard people say; I'm spiritual but not religious; and they aren't interested in the form, or formality. If RM Jiyu's teacher had lived elsewhere rather than at Soji-ji where they had been evolving a form over hundreds of years, would she have met him? Would she have been able to pass on the teaching that she has? It's a question.

Forms aid in the perpetuation and transmission of what the form is about, what the form's pointing to; the contents of the vessel, which is the important thing. Everyone has forms – hairstyles, fashion, traffic lights – things we do or don't do, depending on what culture you're in. We can't escape forms. And as human beings we like forms. We appreciate stability. We don't like things changing underneath our feet. We tend to like to know what's ahead; we don't like surprises. We don't like to feel out of place; we like to fit in, not stick out. Forms – how we do certain things – things that are recognisable and that we can come back to with others, just helps that aspect of our humanity.

Forms also interact with our human nature in positive ways – music can inspire us and draw things out of us that we might otherwise unknowingly keep under wraps. Forms can have inspiring beauty, and can reflect the inner processes that are going on within us when we practice. (He gives examples from the Jukai ceremonies). So form has a role. It's not an end in itself; but it's a skilful means. There has to be a balance: the Buddha cautioned against rites and rituals: but what the Buddha spoke against was not the rituals themselves, but the

belief that just going through the motions could bring about purification without the effort within oneself to purify one's heart and mind. For us what matters is how we do something more than what we do.

Within meditation we don't do something mindlessly and distractedly, but everything is a form of meditation. There's no job that's lower than another; everything is the work of a Buddha, although we rate those people who appear to be more productive than we, as doing better training. But productivity can be an obsession, an expression of attachment; especially if it's something you're good at. A distraction, in a way, from looking at something within that needs looking at; and a vehicle for self – especially if you're good at it.

One of the things that happens in a monastery is that someone who's good at something, or might have professional experience of it, is probably initially not put in a position where they can draw on that experience; just because of the potential for it just becoming a further expression of self. So you may end up stumbling through things that you wish you didn't have to do – RM Jiyu used to say that a monastery should never be too efficient! Which points to – we're not here for efficiency; we're here to work on something; we're here to work on ourselves. And I've seen over the years people who were really good at something – somehow they get distracted by it, and they go off – being really good at that, but not any longer as a monk.

So the Soto way is just meditating throughout the day. There's no real fundamental difference between sitting on your cushion; and walking, or sweeping; or figuring out your income tax: it's not limited to simple things. It's just simply doing what needs to be done.

We don't give people a koan, so there's not that sort of focus that you bring yourself back to. Our koan is noticing what's getting in the way of just doing what needs to be done; what gets in the way of just walking; your doubts, your criticisms of other people – that's the natural koan. Which can become quite extreme. And it's not uncommon in the life of a meditator to come to where those sorts of things that get in the way can take on quite a powerful and obstructive appearance— should I continue on? What's this all about? This isn't getting me anywhere. It's usually some form of doubt, or criticism; or doubts of others. And that's the koan when it really has arisen in the way we mean when

we talk about the koan arising naturally.

And those are moments of great opportunity because it represents part of your mind, if you like, that you're seeing and that you can let go of; and find what's on the other side of that letting go. It can be very challenging, and I'd say from my experience it's at best 50/50 that people accept that challenge because it can be very difficult: there's no solution. In some Temples they might beat you if you do the right thing; beat you if you do the wrong thing: what do you do?! There's no solution! We don't rely on that sort of artifice. We find that daily life will eventually present us with challenges. OK, I'm supposed to let go of this 'whatever', aren't I, if I'm going to continue meditating? But it seems so real or good or promising - - - But meditation is really absolute when it comes to letting go. Especially on the cushion, when there isn't anything practical you're supposed to be doing. Active meditation is a little more complicated, but one can still have that sense of not clinging to personal preference--what one wants --but just listening to what do I do next? Getting out of the way.

As far as the vessel and its contents, and what's inside, Dharma's there; but I view it more as that which is visible and painted on the inner wall of the vessel--Dharma that is in the realm of the known and expressible. But that which is expressed as Dharma comes from a more fundamental root of understanding. Insight is ultimately the contents of the vessel; and the highest purpose of our practice is insight into ourselves in the beginning, and the middle, and the end. Insight that leads to change; and change that leads to deeper insight. All is a movement towards a deepening insight into ourselves. For each of us, there's always another step to take. Something more to cease grasping after; or some aspect of self to cease identifying with. And the Dharma offers teaching at every step to help us forward, no matter where we are on the path. It's been called, "The Heavenly Medicine That Cures All Ills".

The Buddha lived for a long time, and was able to address the human condition over and over again in many ways and from many angles. For the self that suffers, there's teaching how to make life more peaceful, so that the self doesn't suffer so much; and we don't cause so much suffering for ourselves, or for other selves. But if we want to go further than self, the self being problematic to begin with because it is in a position of ultimate isolation and separation,

there is that which bids us and guides us beyond the self.

For those who do evil, there is the teaching of good, which is a next step for them. For those who do good, and want to go beyond it, there is the teaching which points to the transcendence of both good and evil.

So there's implied movement towards something, which naturally we tend to imagine is some sort of experience. And we might call it enlightenment, nirvana, liberation, experiencing the Truth; there are all these phrases and words that talk about this imagined thing that there's apparent movement towards.

So we imagine ourselves experiencing something; and to do that, we simultaneously (usually unconsciously) hold on to this self that's going to experience it. So we maintain this 'self and other' relationship: we have the 'experiencer' that has a natural 'of course' it's true, reality, because it feels true. And this experiencer that wants some experience, other than what it's got – something that it imagines is the purpose of this all.

But it's difficult to become one with something which you hold off as an other, which you separate from yourself. So, even if done with great faith and sincerity, it's best not to hang on to an experiencer that's waiting for a new experience.

Because what happens is more along the lines of the experiencer changing, not the experience. There's nothing wrong with our raw, basic human experience. There's a change, and it happens in the experiencer.

When I say I want to become one with the truth, or the Eternal-- however you characterise or personify that inner lack or something missing, or that something calling, or that not enough-ness of the present moment; or there must be more than this-ness--holding your self in relation to that which you long for or anticipate, can prevent anything along these lines from happening.

But because of the intensity of the longing, it may allow for lesser things to fall away; lesser desires; lesser longings. So it can serve a purpose. But ultimately zazen allows nothing to be clung to, even longing. Or even hope. That might sound – what? Can't have hope? No, let go of that too. It sounds scary, and it's hard to let go of that, but that can be an impediment. Hope can imply – I want

something other than what I've got now. And I'm hoping for it, and longing for it. It implies there's something wrong, something we don't have. And hope just feeds that illusion; that mistake.

So phrases like 'becoming one with the Truth' are actually misleading. As long as there is a 'you' in the equation, the Truth will elude you. There will be that separation of Heaven and Earth that's referred to in the Rules for Meditation.

But if you let the 'you' fall away, as indeed we do in meditation by just letting go of everything, which includes the idea of self – or includes the idea of even falling away – then there's no equation to be solved, there's just True Being, which is without lack. And that's about all you can say about it. If you give it any characteristics, that just causes it to disappear and become a thing; or a transient experience.; or a transient piece of knowledge.

But this True Being embraces self and other as they and all other things arise and pass within it; nothing is discarded; and nothing need be discarded.

So we tend to hold off these big concepts – Enlightenment, liberation, nirvana – we tend to hold them off at a distance. I've even heard monks say – I'm not interested in any of this mystical stuff! I would say – don't sell yourself short! It's not that far away! That's what the Buddha was pointing to; a deep insight into ourselves, beyond just how to make life easier, less full of suffering.

In the Far East I've been told – I've never been there – that many monastics view meditation as just too hard. It's just too hard to do, and their practice might be chanting, which does have value. But from our perspective – no, it's not too hard. Well, the idea that finding the Truth, some understanding, tasting Nirvana, is too hard – that's equally –no! no! (laughing) – don't think that! Just put all these assessments and assumptions aside.

You can waken as well as anyone, if you're just willing to carry on the fundamentals of the practice, which includes just returning to the mind of meditation. Letting go of extraneous thoughts, and doing what needs to be done; following your heart as it voices the path of the precepts to you throughout the normal activities of daily life – it's not rocket science! It's just a matter of commitment to listening and saying yes.

But don't do it in an experience-seeking way, again. Our common flaw is experience seeking; and deriving the meaning and value of life from our experi-

ence. Just do it for its own sake. Training for training's sake is what we say. Not as a goal-oriented effort. Don't hunt for experience, because any experience has to be let go of. The phrase 'enlightenment experience' is actually wrong! At best enlightenment is the last thing you let go of, before you don't need anything. And there's no lack.

To me, realisation has to do with insight into the nature of our minds: our minds being the very source of whatever exists in our world. It's the seeing the birthing of the opposites occurring within our minds, and this created world spewing forth and interacting with everyone else's created world. Truth and delusion are but one pair of opposites that we become entangled with. But when we see this process of creation within ourselves – truly see it, by being still enough to see it – and know the value of desisting from that process, then I feel we are actually appreciating what the Buddha was ultimately pointing to.

So for me the Truth that matters is insight into the way things arise within us; insight into their transitory and ephemeral nature. And seeing this breaks the false reality of our world that is around us that seems to have some absolute reality. That reality is seen through. Indeed the first line of the Dhammapada talks about all the mental phenomena having mind as their forerunner; they have mind as their chief; they are mind-made.

Although one sees – knows – the ephemeral and transient nature of the reality of things, things don't go away. Appearances don't go away. One's just free from the tyranny of their seeming reality and the reality of the self that can't escape from the opposites that are bound to cause suffering if we can't see through them--if we can't find a way to sit still, and just see them arise and pass.

Practical reality and karmic consequence still exist; the feeling of self still exists; but the reality of all of it, including of oneself, is provisional, if you like. It's just accepted as the world of appearances; and just how things are. But one knows something else, as if in a dream when you realise you're dreaming, you know that it's not real! Although the appearance of all this seems very real, there's something more fundamental. And you awaken to the fact that you don't have to be a swirling thought-cloud. You've put something down. You've seen the house-builder; the creator of worlds. You don't seek truth, or call something

delusion; and you return to a place you fundamentally never left. And you've transmuted the ordinary mind into the Buddha mind.

There's the whole alchemical procedure or process of trying to transmute lead into gold; transmute something base into something special. I must wonder if that's code for transmuting the ordinary human mind--something which we tend not to value, and abuse and kick around in all kinds of ways--transmuting (seeing) it's actually the Buddha Mind. Transmuting is an interesting word. We see it in a completely different way; and therefore it becomes different, not because it's changed, but because we understand it is something different than that which we thought it was in the first place.

It is without lack and yet there's no accomplishment that it can hold up; no truth gained to hold up. There's more a falling-away of falseness rather than the gaining of something we can call truth – falling away of falseness and nothing to replace it, but nothing needed to replace it.

So you could say in the end there's nothing in the vessel! That is, nothing you can point to. Except perhaps the primordial immaculacy, purity, innocence that existed before the first thought ever appeared, and the process of knowing and obscuring began.

So that's the end of the talk. I think in the Surangama Sutra there's a Buddhist explanation of how the Universe was created, and it becomes very clear it's not talking about how the planets were formed and all that: it's talking about how our perceived world and how we experience it has come into being, and it starts off with: "Thinking creates the thinker –" and then the game is on, as Sherlock Holmes would say!

So, insight into this world-creating capacity we have; and knowing that we have the ability to moderate it, and can choose to moderate it, is to me the essence of what the vessel of form contains, and what the skilful means of form helps to transmit.

The Illusion of a Persisting Self —

(This is the transcription of a talk given by Rev. Master Daishin at Throssel Hole in August 2016. We are very grateful to him for allowing it to be printed in this edition of the Newsletter.)

I want to talk about the Buddha's enlightenment. Such presumption!

We're much closer than we think, where enlightenment is concerned. Buddhism helps people to find a way towards a resolution of what we might call existential suffering: the suffering that seems to be at the heart of existence. That is, we want to be compassionate, and yet we find ourselves being defensive. We want to end our isolation and love other beings, and yet we fear that in doing so we will lose ourselves.

This suffering is a consequence of much confusion over what I am; who I am.

I've been rereading The Diamond Sutra recently. This is one of the highly condensed sutras in our tradition – very short to read; it takes a lifetime to understand. The sutra is presented as a dialogue between Subhuti and the Buddha. Subhuti is the disciple who is seen as foremost in the teaching on emptiness.

The dialogue begins with Subhuti asking the Buddha this question; *'If good people seek the realisation of enlightenment, how should they abide? How should they control their minds?'* The Buddha's response is not to give a list of all the things we should do, and all the things we should refrain from doing. What he says instead is; *'All beings of whatever kind are caused by the Tathagata, that is by me, to attain unbounded liberation; nirvana'*. All beings of whatever kind are caused by me to attain nirvana. *'And yet when all these uncountable beings have been liberated, no one has been liberated. This is because no bodhisattva who is a real bodhisattva cherishes the idea of an ego identity; a personality; a being; or a separated individual'*.

At first sight this can seem almost a non-sequitur. Subhuti apparently asks – If we seek enlightenment, how should we do it? Can't you just tell me in straightforward language what I need to do? The Buddha does take that approach in other scriptures.

But here he presents us with some dizzying assertions. That the way in which we believe we exist is mistaken. We

have defensive impulses to protect ourselves; and they delineate a line that separates us from others. Our self is defined by our fears. And we believe that identity is the core of our existence. But that very identity is also our isolation.

We may come across various formulae for a good life. We may try hard to follow them. But they turn out to be approximations of the truth. That is to say they bring us in the proximity of the truth, but they never bring us to the truth itself. They get us closer, but not across the existential gap. We seek awakening, and at the same time we fear to lose ourselves.

The Buddha is telling us that we need to let go of the idea of ourselves as being a persisting being. If you're not shocked by that, you're not hearing me.

But actually that is what has been shown to us right from the beginning when we first learned how to meditate. When we learned the practice of neither trying to think, nor trying not to think. That is the practice of letting go of those actions of mind that form our sense of self. It's the illusion of self we need to let go; not the reality of existence. Oh, well, that's all right – I'll just go with the reality of existence

then! Yeah – good luck! Not so simple

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So what I want to do is to take a step back & sketch out some of the things that actually are present within Subhuti's question. I want to show that the whole sutra is contained within his question; actually, the first part of his question. And once we understand what that question really is, we have the whole thing. If we don't understand the question, no answer will help.

So his question: *'If good people seek to realise enlightenment, how should they abide? How should they dwell within the world? How should they control their minds?'*

If good people seek to realise enlightenment – the key is to understand what seeking to realise enlightenment is. When we see that, we meet the Tathagata. Although the sutra is written as a dialogue between the Buddha, that is really a device, a means of conveying something that is beyond any language. The Buddha presented in the scripture is the Tathagata. When he says that he causes all beings to attain Nirvana, that is not the words of a human being. For a human to say that would be arrogance on a cosmic scale. That's not what is meant.

This is a dialogue with the Universe

itself. The Truth itself is called the Tathagata, and the Tathagata responds to the question. The absolute reality which is the Truth of all things is what responds.

I encourage you to ask in meditation: what is this? That question is a posture of mind and body. It's a posture much more than it's words. The whole orientation of one's being towards 'what is' at this moment. When you ask that, you are as Subhuti. Venerating the Tathagata; seeking how to dwell in the world. To ask 'what is this' is a way of acknowledging, and aligning yourself with the deepest wish; the wish to realise enlightenment; to resolve the koan of existence.

It's extraordinarily rare to meet a Buddha. That's actually not because there are so few of them, but because so few of us are prepared to let go of our conceptions of what a Buddha is; and what it is to meet one.

I want to focus on the initial desire for enlightenment; the wish that gives rise to Subhuti's question. That wish is the whole thing. The rest of the teaching is a means of helping us understand our starting point. Training or practice is the effort to understand what we are now.

The term Tathagata can be translated

as 'The One who Comes Thus'; in other words, the Tathagata is the true reality presencing itself now. To seek liberation is to find the Tathagata. We find the Way by discovering the 'how' of the Tathagata. The 'how' of the Tathagata: that's a way of emphasising it's not about learning an explanation of the Tathagata. It is to encounter the functioning of the Tathagata as the 'how', the presencing of this, now.

Dogen tells us '*to carry the self forward and illuminate the myriad things is delusion. When the myriad things come forth and illuminate the self; that is awakening.*' Let me run that by you again: '*To carry the self forward and illuminate the myriad things is delusion*'; that is, when we carry ourselves out to the world, that is delusion. '*When the myriad things come forth and illuminate the self; that is awakening.*' To ask 'What is this?' is to let the myriad things come forth and illuminate the self.

Subhuti's question is based on the wish for enlightenment; the call that we feel. How are we called? How does the desire for the real make itself felt? That is a different question to the question of why we are called to find the Truth. The answer to the question 'why' becomes an effort to explain ourselves to ourselves. To ask why is

fundamentally to be concerned with what causes to happen in the way that it did; what did I do, and what did others do to bring me to where I am. This desire for explanation is valuable. It can help us; but only so far. Explanation is another form of approximation. Something that may bring us to proximity, but does not bridge the gap. It does not precipitate us into Truth. In our human lives, can we ever truthfully say what has caused us to be the way we are?

Understanding the factors that are in play is undoubtedly relevant and necessary, but that itself is not sufficient. So let's try to get to the heart of this. It's not a question of why do I seek for the Truth, but that I seek for the Truth.

To let your zazen be an expression of that call to the Truth is what is involved in taking the posture of 'what is this?' What is it that seeks the Truth? Do not try to explain to yourself.

If you want to meet the Tathagata, you need to bow to That Which Comes Thus. The myriad things that come forth and illuminate the self; that which wishes to know the Truth of Being – is that not the Truth of Being itself? By acknowledging the call as the heart of our existence, we let go of the confusion of who or what we are. We

don't need to make a self. That doesn't mean we don't have a self. It means we don't need to make one.

We allow the myriad things to illuminate the form and shape that is our true self. We aim to do that which is good. We can know what that is if we allow the Universe to show in this moment That Which Is.

We see ourselves as born; as having a history. We are here now, and we have a certain amount of time left before we die. This is persisting self that we mistake for the true. Right now, what is this self? Our past has shaped us, but when we ask the question – what is this, and look without projecting anything, there is no past, no future. There is just this moment.

We do not experience the past in the past: we only know it now. If I'm not making a picture in my mind of who or what I am, how is that? In this moment now, there is the fullness of life. How long or short is this moment? When you sit and don't make a self out of fears and desires, there is profound sufficiency. Where does that begin? Where does that end? It covers all the world.

It's not uncommon for people to have an experience in meditation where they're frightened by the idea of not being who they believe themselves to

be. It can be a very visceral experience. We can experience this fear in *zazen*. We may feel that we have lost all sense of ourselves; that we are lost in a featureless and terrible place. That is not an experience of emptiness. That is an experience of our fear of emptiness.

Notice in the heart of that experience that there is a very definite sense of a 'you' there; a frightened, possibly panicky, you. True emptiness is not like that. To know emptiness is to know nothing is lacking; that the whole world is ungraspably full and overflowing.

We have to get past what we fear emptiness is, to come to the real thing. It is only our fear we have to get past; the terrors we imagine are illusions. That's the thing about fear: it makes illusions look very real.

To understand; to give ourselves to the call, is to find what this life is

really about. That reality can never be possessed. But it truly and really is.

So this truth is not realised so long as we believe that life is about our identity. In a way we can say that we trust our identity to the Universe. To put that another way, we could say that we trust our identity to the Buddha, to the Tathagata. Doing that is obstructed by our sense of continuity; the sense of 'me' as an isolated individual to whom the world happens. I am this thing apart who experiences the world, and is forever subject to what the world may do to me.

When we carry ourselves forward to the world like that, that is delusion. When the world comes forth and illuminates us, we are enlightened. The Tathagata is the world coming forth; this that comes now.

We can bow and ask our question of the Tathagata in a movement that goes on forever.

Reflections

Rev. Master Daishin explains at the beginning of his talk that his subject is the Buddha's enlightenment, and jokes; 'What presumption!' I too feel deeply presumptuous reflecting on these two very helpful talks by senior Masters of our Order.

I only do so because as a lay trainee, I have found that both, with different styles, and with different approaches, have for me made enlightenment and what it means significantly more accessible and approachable.

In Francis Cook's *Sound of Valley Streams: Enlightenment in Dogen's Zen*, he writes that one of the most interesting aspects of enlightenment as Dogen presents it is the way it has lost 'this aura of the otherworldly, the extraordinary, and the inaccessible'. He goes on to say; 'Dogen believed that it was attainable by anyone, lay or monk, who made a serious effort, and he presents it in a remarkably demystified and demythologised way.' He says that his attempt to bring enlightenment down out of the heavens, so to speak, and make it available to all persons is part of the great religious revolution that took place during that period in Japanese history.

And there is something of the same flavour in both these talks. RM Daishin says at the outset: 'We are much closer than we think, where enlightenment is concerned.' While we believe our identity is the core of our existence, he points to it also being the very source of our isolation. 'While I carry myself forward into the world as an isolated individual to whom the world happens, forever subject to what the world may do to me, that is delusion. But when we entrust our identity to the Universe – when the world comes forth and illuminates us, we are enlightened'.

RM Haryo, in pointing out that we tend to imagine enlightenment as some sort of experience; and that we simultaneously (usually unconsciously) hold on to this self that's going to experience it, brought a rueful smile to my face. True, at least for me! Best not to hang on to an experiencer that's waiting for a new experience, he advises. It's more along the lines of the experiencer changing, not the experience.

Like Dogen, he counsels that we can waken as well as anyone if we're just will-

ing to carry on the fundamentals of practice, which he summarises as being a matter of commitment to listening and saying yes - returning to the mind of meditation, letting go of extraneous thoughts and doing what needs to be done; following your heart as it voices the path of the precepts to you throughout the normal activities of the day.

In so doing, insight into the ephemeral nature of the things which arise within us – and the way in which those things arise – is likely to grow.

As so often, the best teaching so often feels like being reminded of what on some level we know already; of being gently steered back on to a path we have a tendency to stray off, distracted by what we perceive and experience in our human minds.

Willie Grieve



Robin redbreast, Ardtornish, Morvern, December 2017

**In the dazzling heart of the dark mid-Winter
Life flares up irrepressibly.**

Rev. Master Favian

Rohatsu and a sleep in the park

On Friday 8th December, Rohatsu, when Buddha's enlightenment is celebrated, I took a walk at Tynninghame, just as dusk began.

I've been reading David Hinton's beautiful and thought provoking/awakening books – *Existence: A Story* and *Hunger Mountain*. These books get to grips with early Chinese thoughts and experiences of consciousness, absence/presence, emptiness and the weave of existence, mirror mind, T'chi energy and early Chinese pictographs and writing, landscapes and poems (and much more). I found them to deeply resonate with my own experiences of Zen practice and landscape walking and the idea of mind as the universe reflecting upon itself. Moment after moment in the here and now there is everything. The walk began with bright low sun bathing the trees in the lane and gradually as the sun diminished darkness came. I mused that on Saturday night I might rather sleep out under these trees and stars than be in Princes Street Gardens with 9,000 others, but then a major part of Zen and of Sleep in the Park is to acknowledge the interconnection and community of all beings and all things, of supporting others as we support ourselves . . . Rohatsu does indeed seem to be an appropriate time to do this.

David Hinton takes the reader back into the distant Chinese past and to some of the first pictographs discovered on oracle bones, which are quite beautiful representations of animals and natural forms. He discusses the gradual evolution of script and language and how within this early pictographic writing, subject/object is almost absent though beginning to form. The I or ego barely features, humans are more at one with the ten thousand things, though consciousness is present as a mirror of 'this'. In the spirit of this here are some scenes from the walk –

Low sunlight
Orange bark.

Dark verticals,
Mirror pools.

Blue grey cloud
Seaweed sand.

Cuboid forms,
Dirt path.

Wave roar,
Spray foam.

Pine needles
Quiet tread.

The ninth was quite some night. At the time Josh Littlejohn was speaking £3.6 million had been raised by the Sleep in the Park action. Taking part was a wild mixture of thoughts and emotions and experience of the actual. I did sleep intermittently amongst the six thousand odd other participants...there was the beauty of the castle, the chatter and giggle of folk, the wrestling with and rustling of plastic survival bags, stars above seen through the slit of my jacket hood, gradually warming in the sleeping bag after standing about and listening to the performances, the rumble of diesel trains and generators, the wild cries in the night of passing drunks, police and ambulance sirens and then gradually the cold creeping in, prompting me to huddle more tightly and adjust positions soothed

by the snoring of my next door neighbours. All through the night there was laughter and a sense of coming together for something good, along with some anxieties, no doubt. When I woke to the hum of conversation and a more continuous crackling of plastic there was sparkling frost. My fingers numbed as I rolled up my mat and thoughts went to others out in this, not so well equipped, not so cared for, instead, looked down on, spat upon and too easily ignored or erased. The challenge of compassionate action is there and I was so pleased that place had been made for schoolchildren to take part in this, to be part of this great communal gesture of compassion.

Jerry Simcock





Time and circumstance —

Caught up in time and circumstance

Israelis are called Israelis

Palestinians are called Palestinians

Letting go of names and ideas

Opening up to the reality of this moment

Vital freedom is already here.

Kathleen Campbell

Sangha members will remember David 'Doddy' Marsh, previously regular attender at Portobello Priory, who has kindly sent us an update on what he's been doing since he left Edinburgh:-

I've been at King's for two years now. I'm there on a Royal Astronomical Society research fellowship. Before that I was in Canada for three years. These were both postdoctoral positions. I'm heading to Göttingen in Germany on an award fellowship as a team leader role, building my own research group. I work on theoretical cosmology, particle physics, and astrophysics. I focus on theories of dark matter, and how we can test them with observations, for example of galaxy motion.

I attach a picture from my trip to Japan last December. It is from Eiheiji. I went there for a day, and had meditation instruction from an American monk. I thought some at the Priory may be interested in the picture. Eiheiji had a special air of calm compared to the temples I visited in the cities.



Eiheiji Temple, Japan, founded by Great Master Dogen in 1244



**Thank you to all the contributors to this issue of the Newsletter.
Deadline for next issue is mid-April 2018**





- Events elsewhere in Scotland with the Prior -

February 2018

Friday 23rd	Aberfeldy evening retreat	7.30-9pm
Saturday 24th	Dundee morning retreat	10am-1pm
Sunday 25th November	Aberdeen morning retreat	10am-1pm

March

Friday 23rd	Aberfeldy evening retreat	7.30-9pm
Saturday 24th	Dundee morning retreat	10am-1pm
Sunday 25th	Aberdeen morning retreat	10am-1pm

April

Friday 20th	Aberfeldy evening retreat	7.30-9pm
Saturday 21st	Dundee morning retreat	10am-1pm
Sunday 22nd	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 -	Ann Milston	(01309) 696392 or hgz@inbox.com

— 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 6th January, Saturday 10th February, Saturday 10th March, Saturday 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 Master Favian Straughan
