

—Portobello Buddhist Priory—



A Temple of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives



*Rev Alina, Rev Master Haryo & Rev Master Favian at Portobello
Priory for the Priory's 20th Anniversary celebrations —*

Newsletter & Calendar of Events January—April 2019

Portobello Buddhist Priory
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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 2019

| | | |
|------------|---------------------|------|
| Sunday 6th | Renewal of Precepts | 11am |
|------------|---------------------|------|

February

| | | |
|------------|---------------------|------|
| Sunday 3rd | Renewal of Precepts | 11am |
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March

| | | |
|------------|---------------------|------|
| Sunday 3rd | Renewal of Precepts | 11am |
|------------|---------------------|------|

April

| | | |
|------------|--------------------------------|------|
| Sunday 7th | 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)*

Newsletter

61st edition
December 2018
(& 21st e-edition)



Portobello Priory's 20th Anniversary edition!



— *Prior's Notes* —

Train ... ing

The Journey you'd always promised yourself to make
The one of a life-time
Been away from home too long, put off for years
So busy doing other things, saying this was living
-feeling it was half that
Until one day, fit to burst....you bought a ticket

Even then you nearly missed the train
Moving off down the track without you
Had to jog a bit, jump up to get on
Those heavy bags slowing you down

But now.... You just sit
Nothing much else to do on a train
Yet hard to settle, hard not to fidget
Is this the right train home – could you have made a mistake?
Best check your ticket, check with your neighbor,
Still not sure, ask another –
They seem convinced
When in doubt, start talking; too much, too loud
Drink coffee, eat sweets, flickering eyes over magazine screens

Anything, to cover this unease

Time passes, and something in the tickity-tock of the wheels
Turning helps

You look out the window: through the transparent reflection of yourself
Funny thing, can't see in front – and you can't see behind
Only 'just this'
Whatever's floating passed the window frame:
Houses and gardens (lovely roses)
Couples walking (wonder where they've been)
Children waving (like you years ago)
Tunnels too that plunge you into darkness
But point towards the light
And all these things pass, and they pass, and they pass
While above: always the sky, where clouds form with dignity and brilliance
Changing and dissolving
As you move down the track
Where the trip becomes one with the arrival
And though not seeing the driver
Trusting he knows the way Home



Portobello Buddhist Priory's Twentieth Anniversary—



The 20th Anniversary cake!

We were glad to welcome Rev Master Haryo and Rev Alina on the weekend of 9 - 11 November. The Sangha had a ceremony on the Friday evening to mark Remembrance Day for all those who suffer due to war and conflict. This was followed by tea and questions with RM Haryo.

Saturday included decorating the temple with Dharma bunting and banners to mark our Priory's 20th year, while RM Haryo applied his renowned maintenance skills around the temple.

Sunday morning the Sangha came in substantial numbers to meditate and join in the Founder's ceremony for

Rev. Master Jiyu. Afterwards we watched some early 70's footage of her at Throssel Hole. Rev Master Haryo gave us an interesting account of life in the early years of the Order which was followed by questions and answers.

To round off the event we had a fine buffet with a special 20th birthday cake, much appreciated by all.

Many thanks to the monks for visiting us and to all the Sangha who came and supported the weekend at the temple.

In gassho, Favian

The Mesmerising Dance of Starlings

Recently I read '*Twelve Points Concerning Ceremonial*' by Reverend Master Oswin Hollenbeck which can be found here - <https://www.shastaabbey.org/pdf/TwelvePointsConcerningCeremonial.pdf>

Before reading the '*Twelve Points*' I started to watch the starlings' murmuration, which I continue to watch in awe at every opportunity. As I watch I witness the co-relation of oneness with all things and thanks to Reverend Master Oswin's guidance, for the first time make the connection with ceremony. Borrowing a phrase, '*In total immersion of oneness*'.

It might be true to say that ceremony was designed to create the immersion of oneness for all who participate, with the intention of spreading inner peace and outward joy.

I love ceremony, especially watching the monks at Throssel participate seamlessly in ceremony. Never a step out of place, yet perfection is not the object of the exercise which is only to spread the essence of harmony and oneness like ripples in a pond.

I agree with Reverend Master Oswin's point; 'We have a blueprint and then there is the actual'. Yet even for a fleeting moment if the sequence is broken for any reason, it is like being robbed of something you can't explain.

Sheila Anderson



A murmuration of starlings



Frost in Torridon, north-west Scotland

Exploring Attachment

For a long time, I have had some interest in physics and mathematics. Now that I am no longer working very much, I have more time, and I had the thought that I would devote this time to studying physics and maths. Doing this produced a feeling of exhilaration. Every time I was not otherwise occupied, I could turn to these studies without having to think what to do. It also meant that I did not encounter as much uncertainty, self-doubt and boredom that could come up when I was unoccupied. It was enjoyable, but something else I noticed was that I began to feel distant from dharma and training. I continued to practice zazen as before, but it felt like there was something missing – a subtle sense of the aliveness of training. Eventually I became exhausted and had to stop studying at this amount.

It is possible to use ideas as an intoxicant. Intoxicants give relief from suffering by numbing the general level of our experience. The price we pay for this is that we are less in touch with the reality of our true life. I think that this was happening with my studies. It

enabled me to short-circuit the seeming messiness of moment-to-moment existence, hence the resulting feelings of elation. Yet it is in this existence that we find fulfilment, and that is what I was missing. True freedom comes from opening to the whole of life as it emerges – the doubts and uncertainties as well as the joys. Any other activity, person or idea can become an intoxicant in this way. It is not the activity/idea itself that is usually the problem as much as the way we invest ourselves in it. I have cut right back on the physics and maths, but am still enjoying it, and this feels more in balance.

Dogen says, “To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be actualised by a myriad things”. This suggests that we can’t forget the self – and thereby be actualised – without first studying, or seeing, the self. If we try to look away from what is uncomfortable, we inhibit our awareness and can lose sight of the richness of life.

Neil Rothwell

West Allendale

(This poem, and accompanying words written by Rawdon Goodier, first appeared in the Newsletter in 2007)

1.

Familiar circle of moorland
Falling to stone dykes
Great field barn
Scattered farmsteads
Mosaic of grass and rushes

Was it a thrush
Heard at the moor's edge
Answering the loud curlew
Until both were quelled
By the storm?

Moorland colours
Bleached by snow
Voices of streams
Merged with the great breath
Sweeping the dale.

2.

What is it
That comes thus,
Riding the wind,
Combing the branches,
Scouring the heart's depths?

Shafts of sunlight,
Wood striking wood,
Scent of spring sap,
Taste of fresh rain,
Even memory is now.

In this place

At this time,
As elsewhere and always,
What is this
That thus comes?

3.

When even to speak
Is to miss the mark,
What offering
Can be made
Among these hills?

Still,
In this emptiness
Under the scudding clouds,
Among these lichen stones,
And in this moment,
Enfolding every other,
Being is bowing.

West Allendale, as will be already well known to visitors to Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey, is the beautiful North Pennine valley in which the Abbey is situated.

I first started meditation practice at Throssel, then a Priory, in February 1979 but felt neither the ability or need to find expression of this experience until the end of the Jukai sesshin in 1989 when, very unusually for me, it seemed to emerge naturally in verse form. Naturally, maybe, but not quickly for it took several years to complete and was first published in the Journal of Throssel Hole Priory for the summer of 1995.

Empathy and the self

An old friend of mine died a few months ago, in his 90s. When I think of him as I write this, I have a stab of loss. I will miss never seeing him again. He was an endearing and unusual man who led a deeply interesting life. Self-educated, he was rooted in the same West of Scotland working class culture from which my parents came, and in a set of traditions and values and aspirations with which I'm familiar from my upbringing.

In his later years, he became quite isolated as almost all of his friends had died, and he didn't belong to any clubs or societies. He did, however, attend the book club I had set up, and at the last meeting he was able to attend, he made a moving statement at the end of the meeting, saying that he regretted how competitive in argument he had been, and that he felt that this competitiveness had separated him from other people in the group. He apologised for his behaviour.



Caerketton at sunset, the Pentlands, December 2018

And it's true that he did have a black belt in disputation; he was a Sherman tank of a debater. 'What's your evidence for that?' was his repeated demand if unsatisfied with your assertions, as he glowered at you pugnaciously. 'Define what you mean by that! Where's your evidence?' When excited by an idea or discussion or a challenge, he would shift about in excitement, like a dog scenting a rabbit, panting slightly, so eager to get his oar in, eyes shining. I found it an endearing feature: there was a curious innocence to it, and an entire absence of maliciousness. But it would be true

to say that some could find it intimidating, overly-confrontative and perhaps not conducive to exploratory discussion.

He had competed in two Olympic Games; and had served as a very young man in the special forces during the war at the sharpest end of the fighting, engaging in activities which haunted him in his older age. There was indeed a highly competitive and striving aspect to his personality which at least on the surface sat oddly with his political and social idealism.

In any case, the honesty of his confession and apology, the capacity for self-reflection and self-awareness in this man in his mid-90s moved everyone there. At root, I think, he was a man who profoundly believed in and yearned for deep connection. I think it's no coincidence that the book he most often mentioned to me in his last years was Jeremy Rifkin's '*The Empathic Civilization*', in which the author argues that the need to belong is the deepest need we have. Empathy, he says, is grounded in the acknowledgement of death and the celebration of our fragile life; rooting for each other to flourish & be, in the midst of our frailties & fragility & imperfections.

In preparing to speak at his funeral, I read the book, or at least those parts dealing with the development of empathy (it's a big book!)

At the heart of it is the author's contention that we have an empathic predisposition embedded even down to our biological level, but that this doesn't really begin to show itself until the age of eighteen months to two and a half years, when the infant begins to develop a sense of self and other. In other words, it is only when the child is able to understand that someone else exists as a separate being from himself, that he is able to experience the other's condition as if it were his own, and to respond appropriately. Two-year old children will often wince in discomfort at the sight of another child's suffering and come over to him or her to share a toy, or cuddle, or bring him over to their own mother for assistance.

The extent to which this develops and deepens over time will, of course, depend on early parenting behaviour as well as the values and world-view of the culture one is embedded in.

That empathy is deeply important in human life and in the alleviation of suffering seems evident. As Carl Rogers put it:

‘When a person realises he has been deeply heard, his eyes moisten. I think in some real sense, he is weeping for joy. It is as though he were saying, “*Thank God, somebody heard me. Someone knows what it’s like to be me*”.’

However, it was the author’s very unambiguous statement that the development of empathic consciousness is completely and inextricably intertwined with the development of the self which particularly caught my attention. How does this sit with Buddhism and the core principle of the insubstantiality of the separate self, I wondered?

But if I’m honest, the way I express that is disingenuous: it didn’t just catch my attention, and I didn’t just ‘wonder’ in a detached, objectively interested, amiable way – my mind was on to it like a dog after a rabbit, not dissimilar to my friend. I too scented something; and that something was rather threatening in the sense of potentially contradicting the ‘no self’ element in Buddhism, and I wanted – quite urgently, without pausing to reflect - to ‘deal’ with that, and either prove the author wrong, or make the two concepts somehow fit together. And if I’m to continue being honest, this is a re-write of my first version of the article in which I tried to do precisely that.

And having done so, and having tied myself in intellectual knots, it belatedly occurred to me what was going on; and I could only smile ruefully – and start again.

It may be that there is an interesting discussion to be had about the development of the self, and to what degree it is or isn’t permanent or absolute or separate, and the degree to which empathy does or doesn’t depend on a separate self; but that’s not the point, or so it seems to me, of our training.

What seems much more important is to sit with the working of the mind, to observe the ways in which it swings towards and away from things; where feelings of threat and safety seem to come from, and how that is reflected in how we are in the world, and with others.

That, and to go and light a candle for my friend, and sit with his loss.

Willie Grieve

Loss and Gratitude

A dharma lesson I am embracing wholeheartedly is that of gratitude.

The effect of the loss of a dear friend recently was that of such sadness that I seemed to have no energy to do anything and for several days every activity seemed to be pointless.

However, a shift of direction in thought meant that instead of lingering on her absence I began to realise how wonderful knowing her had been, what a joy and pleasure it had been to be in her company, and how utterly grateful I am to have known her.

This feeling of gratitude has spilled over into so many areas of my life. It has woken me up to the awareness that I am so lucky to be where I am - in this time and this space. I've been a member of the Dundee group for some time now and my gratitude for the dharma that the members of the group bring fills me with over-flowing gratitude and love.

I bow in gratitude to the world and all its inhabitants.

Homage to the Buddha
Homage to the Dharma
Homage to the Sanga

Liz Evans



Winter's rest

Yesterday, as I lifted the lid of the water butt to put some dry willow bundles in to soak, I notice cracked ice pieces floating on the water's surface. Winter is here.

We have been busy in the gardens since the last great snow falls of March and are only now slowing down a little – we still have lupins and daisies flowering. As light fades and temperatures drop, plants submerge into rest or are spent and, for myself, I have a feeling of contented withdrawal, of slowing down. Laying back, resting and recovering.

I am pleased to have time now to recharge my batteries. At a recent dharma talk and discussion at the Priory about the Buddha's Enlightenment we were reminded of the Buddha's placing of his hand to the earth to draw upon support in the face of Mara: this has led me to consider once more the importance of earth as our ground and support.

Over the past few years I have been

much pre-occupied with earth, soil, ground as I have worked on growing, gardening and reforestation projects, working alongside folk who need some support and a helping hand. This form of therapy seems to work well for all of us. I like working collaboratively, with mutual support, getting my hands dirty. Working with soil, seeding and nurturing growth and well-being seems a useful way of living. All of these thoughts have clustered together to form wildseed zen – my way of understanding practice.

Within practice I notice the need for balance between the physical and the ephemeral. At times when sitting zazen I can be with the vast blue skies but then need to feel the ground beneath my feet. This brings me to soil/earth and winter.

I have not dug into ground for a few weeks now, I have eased back and growth and earth are doing the same. I like to consider how earth renews, how the cycle of life and death goes on and renews, how forms dissolve and, in the spring, others come up. Our

earth is precious, without topsoil we could not be; without withdrawal, ceasing and dying back, the process of decay, micorrhizal and micro-bacterial actions, the work of worms and beetles, the actions of weather on soil and rock we could not continue. The earth is indeed our ground, it is fundamental to our existence.

As I consider this jumble of thoughts I am grateful, thankful for the teachings on dependent arising, interconnection and impermanence and for the teachings of the earth. It lends some under-

standing to “all is Buddha-nature”. As we ourselves move through life, old age and death we pass through many forms and eventually return to earth and space to be part of continuing phenomena. In this season, just as plants and trees draw back, some to continue, some to decay, I notice the process in myself and I relax and rest in this welcome winter darkness. I am content with ‘this’. Earth and winter are great teachers.

Jerry Simcock



“Write about Tenzin, Annie—!”

When I read Rev Favian's request for contributions to the newsletter I said to my friend who I was away with for a couple of days with; "Well I'd like to help but I've no clue as to what I would write about..and wise Ros said "*Write about Tenzin, Annie, he has completely changed your life, its really a story of unconditional love and that must be a good thing to write about*". So I am....

This year I decided to get a puppy. My first dog, acquired in my later years required quite a bit of consideration. I chose a Lhasa Apso ...a Tibetan monastery dog, bred apparently to alert monks to intruders in the monastery. Wuff! I chose Tenzin because my daughter's family has the same breed of dog (she is a cousin to my puppy and one year older) and I chose the same breed because of Cara's sweet nature.

Well I thought I had planned this out and thought of most things. Training, expense, time, walks, socialising etc etc. How wrong can one woman be!... I had not planned or expected the worry when he is poorly, or escaping yet again! The overwhelming sense of utter responsibility, the deep and special love I developed for him almost from day one —

I have children, I have grandchildren, I love them devotedly and I knew I would love a little dog. But NEVER did I realise my life would be completely changed! He cannot tell me what is wrong when he is in pain (once or twice only, thank heavens): he can only look at me and wait for me to figure it out and DO something. Blocked glands are a nightmare; my daughter's dog suffered too once or twice, and when I rang her in despair as Tenzin howled and circled and howled some more she said; "Oh I know, don't tell me, when Cara had it she was crying, Caroline was crying, we were all crying! " Well me too ! What can I say, a tender hearted family. Thankfully the vet sorted it. Phew!

This tiny 'bearded lion of Lhasa' aptly named, believe me, is incredibly lively, loving, naughty and cheeky at the same time as being sweet, cranky, bouncy and, I have discovered, an escape artist like no other! My large garden which he loves has been puppy-proofed over and over again. My kind neighbour who has been helping me to chicken wire it and I, keep thinking; "That's it, he

won't get out now." HAH!... Not a chance, he looks at us from the neighbouring field with an innocent expression and we have no clue how he got there.

Before I went to collect him I had given a lot of thought to his name, he is very fluffy and furry and I considered Myska ... Russian for teddy bear as he looks a bit like one, but in the end decided on a Tibetan name to live up to. Well, it was a good choice, as he is brave and dignified for such a wee doggie and it suits him.

I am now a 'dog' person and I get it...I loved my cats so much and they made my life special but there is no doubt a dog is different. I don't rule out another cat but not till Tenzin gets through his teens. He is 8 and a half months now and definitely getting rebellious .. just have to grit my teeth, I guess.

Oh Tenzin my little one, you look at me with such devotion, and trust me implicitly to give you what you need; despite that I am learning as I go along. And I swear my heart is twice as big as I learn again the true meaning of unconditional love.

Annie Turner



Tenzin!



*Thank you to all the contributors to this issue of the Newsletter.
Deadline for next issue is mid-April 2019*





- Events elsewhere in Scotland with the Prior -

February 2019

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

March

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

April

| | | |
|---------------|---------------------------|----------|
| Friday 26th | Aberfeldy evening retreat | 7.30-9pm |
| Saturday 27th | Dundee morning retreat | 10am-1pm |
| Sunday 28th | Aberdeen morning retreat | 10am-1pm |

For further details please phone :

| | | |
|--------------------|--------------------------|--|
| Aberdeen - | Eddie Shields | (01224) 861732 |
| | or Joyce & Gordon Edward | (or mobile 07870 140427) (01467) 681525 |
| Aberfeldy - | Robin Baker | (01887) 820339 |
| Dundee - | Liz Evans | (01337) 870402 |
| | | (or mobile 07763 188461) |
| 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 9th February, Saturday 9th March, Saturday 13th 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*