

# —*Portobello Buddhist Priory*—



A Temple of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives



*Spring daffodils*

## *Calendar of Events* May-August 2010

**Portobello Buddhist Priory  
27 Brighton Place, Portobello  
Edinburgh, EH15 1LL**

**Telephone (0131) 669 9622**

**email: [favian.straughan@homecall.co.uk](mailto:favian.straughan@homecall.co.uk)**

**website: [www.portobellobuddhist.org.uk](http://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 -

### June 2010

Sunday 20th	Renewal of Precepts	11am
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### July

Sunday 18th	Festival of Avalokiteshwara	11am
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### August

Sunday 8th	Renewal of Precepts	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.

*(Please phone beforehand, and please note when the Prior  
is holding retreats elsewhere)*

# Newsletter

no. 35  
April 2010

## — Prior's Notes —

**I** was kindly invited to a classical music concert a while ago, a chamber concert involving individual musicians coming together to perform the works of a great composer. I was struck by this 'coming together' of these separate musical voices; violin, cello and piano. Each a unique voice and talent taking their place within this musical family, responding to the call of the composer's written score and how in this intermingling of sounds a creative unity is born; a sum greater than its parts.

It is the creative conversation of this family; the statement, the response, the tension and resolution which for the listener creates a fulfilling and complete sense of the sound world. In performing this creative act the musicians have to tune-in to each other. One is impressed by their engaged attention, the alive silence before the answering phrase, which can seem inevitable in its rightness.

To achieve this seemed to require a giving of the performer for the sake of the other and the music, but also so the performers themselves could be fulfilled in that music, taken up as it were into the greater sound life of the work.

Something about this evening's experience resonated with me: why were we, the audience, drawn into stillness and silence before this spectacle? Partly, it felt like a recognition of how our own lives can be lived. In our coming together with the situations of our lives, what is the work that comes to us and can we engage whole-heartedly? We don't have to be great artists or produce the 'perfect performance' to live this way: the life of Buddha can use everything that we are.

What shall we play today?

### **Inside this issue-**

<i>The Life of the Emotions</i>	2
<i>Bus stop (poem)</i>	3
<i>Rev Master Haryo's visit</i>	4
<i>Soup in Silence at Shasta</i>	5
<i>Freedom &amp; A Blaze of Blue (poems)</i>	8
<i>The Braid Burn in Spate</i>	9
<i>The Ship and Three Drums</i>	10
<i>Jukai</i>	11

## *The Life of the Emotions*

**E**motions are part of our inbuilt survival systems.

Psychologists have suggested that there are five basic emotions common to all ages and cultures – anger, sadness, disgust, happiness and fear – and that other emotions are a combination of these. The function of emotions seems to be to signal action that is required in a situation. For example, fear is a signal to flee from a danger or fight it; disgust causes us to avoid something that may be toxic or harmful. Animals also show emotions. The difference in humans is that we have the ability to picture situations in our minds that can cause the same emotional reaction as if it were real. This is the basis of worry, for example, where we feel anxiety in response to imaginary situations that usually never actually occur. When we feel strong emotion, our brains temporarily go into an altered state which can radically alter the way we see things. We talk about some strong emotions being “blind” (blind panic, blind rage) in recognition that we lose the subtlety of a calmer perspective of events. Again, this is helpful if there is an immediate threat, requiring action rather than reflection, but thankfully this is rarely the case for most of us.

In meditation, we can see our emotional life more clearly. Emotions are not in themselves an obstacle to train-

ing but we can easily get caught up trying to avoid or get rid of unpleasant feelings and hold on to pleasant ones. I notice that many of my thoughts are trying to achieve this, or plan the protection of my self/ego in some other way. One thing that zazen offers us is the ability to see this whole process non-judgementally as part of a deeper context. It is the nature of emotions to have an intense quality at times but in the space of awareness they take their place as simply what is being revealed to us right now.

Emotions can reveal underlying attitudes which we were previously not aware of. For example, anger may occur because some sense of fairness has been violated in our view. The source of this may be a sense of morality but if the anger feels out of proportion to the situation, this can be a signal that this attitude has become a bit overvalued by us. Similarly, anxiety is often fuelled by a need to preserve something we believe we cannot do without e.g. a sense of calm or even a sense of who we are. We can have faith in the sufficiency of zazen to reveal what we need to see.

If I am feeling disturbed in an everyday situation, I sometimes find it helpful to label the emotion I am experiencing. This can help the focus move away from thoughts about the seeming

difficulty of an external situation to a more direct inner awareness. This can help to reveal that the emotion is an integral part of the situation I am responding to. At other times, particularly in zazen, it can feel best not to

describe my experience using language or concepts, but rather to be with what is here with trust and openness.

*Neil Rothwell, Lay Minister*

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## *Bus stop*

my thoughts  
are like buses  
always  
another one  
to hop on  
to

but  
when I sit  
at the  
bus stop

the question  
arises

is there  
anywhere

I *really*  
have to  
get  
to?

*Jenny Smith (2007)*

## *Rev Master Haryo's visit —*



*Rev Master Haryo with some members of the congregation*

**T**he Scottish sangha had a very welcome visit in March from Rev Master Haryo, Head of the Order.

Rev Master's benign presence at the Priory was valued by everyone who had the opportunity to meet him during his stay, as was his teaching. In a dharma talk, he said that his sense was that as we understand understanding, the Buddha didn't understand anything at the moment of enlightenment. In the context of our Buddhist training, and without belittling intellect, our predisposition to look towards understanding is a kind of red-herring – or, as he put it, heading off north in order to go south.

When we sit, we don't try to understand anything – we let go of the effort of trying to understand. He quoted the phrase 'truth beyond understanding', and said that this more probably describes the nature of the Buddha's experience, and where freedom and peace come from. It's a state of being, rather than of knowing – not an understanding in the conventional sense.

A recording of Rev Master's talk is available at the Priory for anyone wishing to hear it.

*Bill Grieve*

## *Soup in Silence at Shasta*

**I**n November 2009 I had the privilege of spending a week with the monks and lay residents at Shasta Abbey in California.

My Shasta journey started in San Francisco, with a series of fortunate occurrences within what were unfortunate events but that's a story for another article. I left the city on the Greyhound Bus Service and I arrived in Weed, the nearest stop for Shasta Abbey, on a clear blue sky day. I alighted from the bus and was greeted by a view of the snow-capped Mount Shasta, around which wisps of white cloud were circulating. It was a magnificent sight and I gazed in wonder with thoughts of the Zen altar and Mount Sumeru coming to mind.

I was met by Reverend Celia who drove me to the abbey, which was situated at the foot of the mountain with the freeway severing the land in-between. I was welcomed so warmly at the guesthouse, with Reverend Veronica taking time to show me around the complex of log buildings and raised walkways that make up a proportion of the abbey grounds. The remaining land was utilised in numerous ways; whether that was by the tall evergreen trees that made the abbey smell of pine, or the shrines dotted around the grounds including the

stupa of Reverend Master Jiyu-Kennett, or the compost piles, or the animal graveyard; every aspect offering teaching.

The moon was full that night and the reflection of the light on the snow on the mountain gave the abbey a glow which I hope I will remember as long as I live. I slept very well in the guesthouse in spite of the noise from the freeway (it helps having been brought up on an A-road I'm sure) and the occasional thud of a fir cone hitting the deck from 20 meters up. The following day I was into the monastic week of meditation, ceremony, working meditation and dharma. My lay duties were to help in the abbey kitchen and it was a terrific experience: I have never before worked in a kitchen catering for large numbers, and was impressed by the calm atmosphere despite the pressures. The kitchen was run by Reverend Vivian, who was assisted by Reverend Sheridan and Reverend Brett. I was one of four lay helpers in the kitchen and as well as delivering three meals a day to the community, we would gather for coffee and some dharma for 30 minutes prior to lunch.

It was during one of these dharma sessions that Reverend Vivian brought up the subject of koans and, most poignant for me, the koan of loving without

attachment. I was in the dark about koans, and am often confused by them; however when Reverend Vivian spoke about this particular koan I felt something stir for me. This would be the case at several other occasions during my stay at the abbey; however the koan of loving without attachment still captures my attention because I feel that it is a koan that has arisen throughout my life as searching for love is a common cause of suffering for me.

During my stay I joined the lay study group, who at that time were using the book 'Zen Seeds – Reflection of a Female Priest' by Shundo Aoyama (there are copies in the Portobello Library). We read a chapter called 'Plum Blossom Harmonizes with Snow' where the author used the plum blossom to illustrate how she views sad events in life. She writes that the plum tree blossoms during the winter, when conditions for blossom are not ideal, but under more favourable conditions the plum tree will not blossom or, if it does, the blossom will not be fragrant like it is during a hard winter. The sadness of life enriches us, making us stronger, despite the circumstances not being favourable. She states 'What matters most is how we take misfortune'.

I was also lucky to be at the abbey for the Celebration of the Contribution of Women in Buddhism weekend. Members of the lay community joined with

some of the female monks to celebrate the role played by women, whether they were Buddhist Practitioners or were leading lives that aspire and illustrate love and compassion. The central figure was of course Reverend Master Jiyu-Kennett and her contribution to the development of Buddhism.

Presenters used various mediums to bring about reflective thought and show their gratitude to the particular individual(s) that they were presenting on. There was music, song, poetry and art. Then in the middle of the event Reverend Vivian gave a talk entitled 'Buddhist Women Beyond Inadequacy'. As with the koan dharma, this talk was very poignant for me and I identified with what Reverend Vivian was saying on a deep level. Reverend Vivian spoke about the damage that inadequacy can cause and how it prevents us from connecting with our Buddha Nature. When inadequacy arises and we act upon it we are likely to break the precepts; I related to this as I know I can be very self-deprecating and when I am I do not use right speech to describe myself to others, for example. The thoughts of worthlessness and being inadequate are a self fulfilling prophecy, and as pride is an indulgence of the self so inadequacy is the opposite side of the same coin. There is a way to end this suffering and solve the koan of inadequacy and that is to seek refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, and to





follow the precepts.

So why the title 'Soup in Silence at Shasta'? I will end on the story of one medicine meal in the lay guesthouse. I had taken only a glass of soya milk that night whilst other lay guests had opted for soup. The meals were silent and as I sat with my milk I suddenly became fixated on the slurping noises of guests eating their soup. As the noise flooded my thoughts I felt annoyance arising and I was telling myself that I should ask to be excused from the meal (reading that back, I cannot believe the sound of slurping could result in such a strong reaction in me). However, out of the corner of my eye I noticed the Buddha statue which was placed at the head of the table. As my gaze fell on the statue I noticed the look of contentment and calm on the Buddha's face and at that moment I

realised that it was my mind manifesting the annoyance and not the noise. I knew then that I didn't have to do what my mind was suggesting and leave instead, like the Buddha; I could sit in the conditions and find calm and contentment. I'm pleased to say I then enjoyed and finished my milk at the table with the slurpers.

I wish to thank the Sangha at Shasta Abbey: your warm welcome and dedication to the teachings of the Buddha was humbling. Thank you also to the lay guests with whom I shared my time; I was taken with the sense of belonging and understanding that was generated even in the silence.

*In gassbo*

*Naomi Healey-Cathcart*

## *Freedom*

Freedom; like raindrops dancing in the summer sky  
Full of shade and sun  
Like the bottom of the ocean untouched by the waves  
And thoroughly the same  
Like the waves in their unfolding, and the ocean foam  
Can but fizz, can but froth

Freedom; when it is not like anything  
No left, no right  
Ongoing  
Swoosh!

*Kimberley Cadden*

## *A Blaze of Blue*

Walking up the lane from the distillery  
I find its sweat water millpond  
Feeding the thirst that makes a whiskey,  
You are tightly fenced in, deep water.

I stop, seeing ripples—of a fish?  
No, it's a dipper, now bobbing on a branch.  
Then a streak of blue just catches my eye,  
Almost too fast to follow.

You are a beautiful iridescent blue  
Painting a brilliant metallic vein,  
Across a dark brown scene.  
I am so lucky to have seen you.

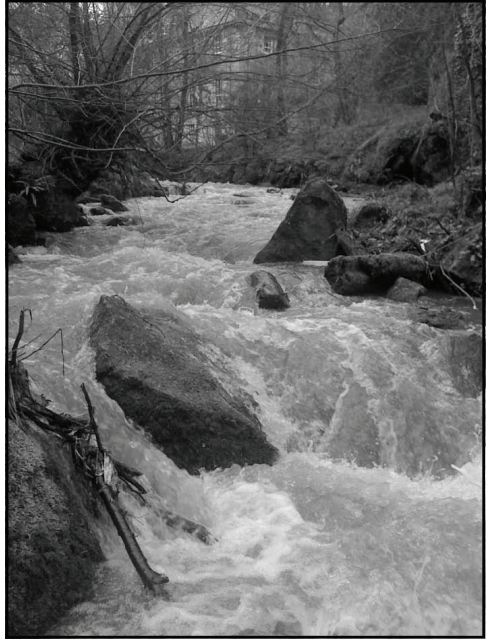
*John Dickson*

## *The Braid Burn in Spate —*

**D**uring one of our recent Dharma talks at the Priory we were discussing the chapter entitled 'The Boatman' from Rev Master Daishin's new book. A

question arose regarding the nature of what we believe to be true and how it can be unsettling to have this challenged. Can something we hold to be true still be true if it changes?

Near my home is the Braid Burn which rises in the Pentlands, flows through the south side of Edinburgh and empties into the Firth of Forth at Portobello. My wife Carolyn and I walk our dogs by the banks of the burn and over Blackford Hill.



It's April, but late snows and spring rains have put the stream in *spate*. The water brown, a tumult, swirling, accumulating, collecting detritus. Our dogs are cautious. This will change, soon the burn will slow, the water will run clean and shallow out. We will see the riverbed again and although the same, not quite as before.

What do we know of the burn? In part it is water, but it is not only water. Without water it is a riverbed, a dry channel, a pathway. Both need each other for verification if not validation. The burn flows constantly. It is not possible to separate one bit of water from another as it swirls, eddying, rushing on its journey to join the sea. When we look at the burn we cannot grasp the burn, we cannot even really see it, we can only trust that it is there. There is comfort to be found in the changing nature of the burn through acceptance of its truth or nature. After all, it is also our nature.

*David Campbell*

# The Ship and Three Drums



*(During his recent visit, Rev Master Haryo brought some 'Ship and Three Drums' lapel badges which are freely available for sangha members. During a talk, he read out the following article which recently appeared in the OBC Journal. It is an adaptation of an original article by Rev. Master Koten Benson.)*

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**T**he symbol which we refer to as the ship and three drums comes down to us from India. It is a stylization of a Sanskrit letter, the vowel sound “i.” In Sanskrit this sound is considered to be of the highest vibration; the symbol of ungraspable spontaneity and freedom, the enlivening vowel. It was originally written as three dots arranged as a triangle, with a curved line beneath. It was often used as a metaphor for the elements of training arranged in the right balance. i.e. if the three dots are vertical or horizontal they do not make up the letter but only when rightly arranged. So it represented the three Refuges or three aspects of training such as Compassion, Love and Wisdom.

When Buddhism entered China the similarity of the Sanskrit letter to the Chinese character for heart-mind was noted, and the meaning of this character, (i.e. essence, spirit, heart, physical and spiritual, as well as mind and Mind) blended into the meaning of the Sanskrit letter.

Our tradition holds the whole meaning of the Sanskrit letter and Chinese character together indistinguishably. Thus we have the “three circles of the Soto Lineage” as well as the three circles made by the celebrant with the spade or torch at the funeral ceremony. In the eye opening ceremony for a Buddha statue the three dots are made by the pen or brush. In all of the above the “three dots” are the “enlivening aspect” of the Dharma, that is our own meditation and training which we bring to the ceremony and to all aspects of daily life.

In the symbol of the Ship and Three Drums the ship which carries all beings to the other shore is the container, the Dharma, the lineage and the three drums are the Life- the enlivening aspect- the True Sound of the Dharma.

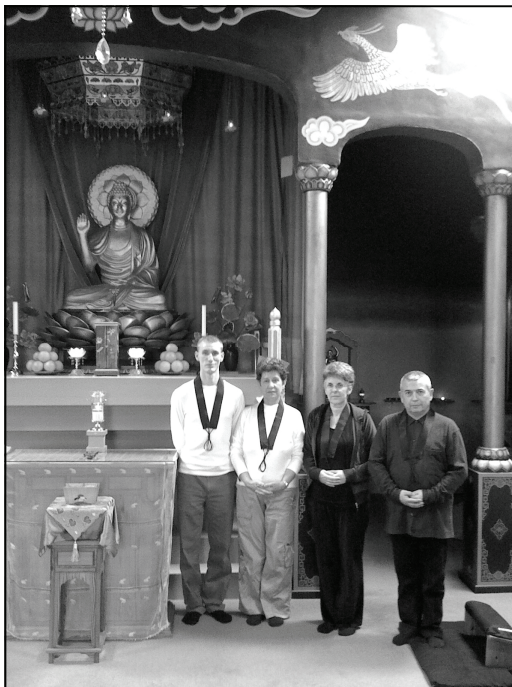
It has always been taught, however, that we must go quickly beyond understanding the mere symbol to truly understanding, through our own experience, the great Matter which lies beyond.

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*Jukai* —

**O**ur congratulations go to Scottish sangha members who formally took the Precepts at the Jukai retreat at Throssel Hole for the first time this April: Gabriella, David, Janis, Nicol, Marianna and Michael (even though he's at Cambridge.) Not so much endless training, as boundless. In gassho.

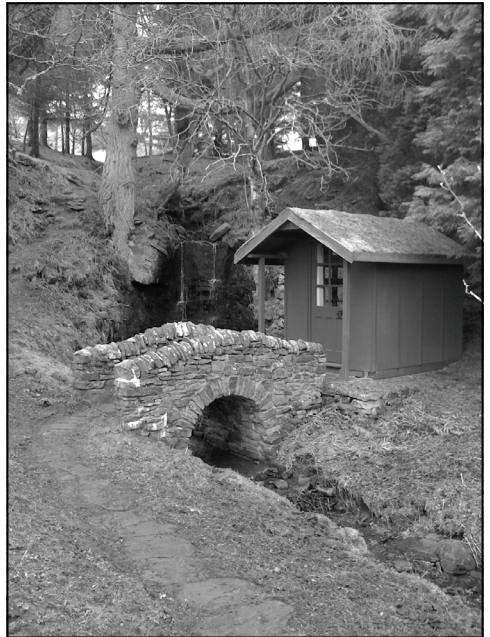
*Rev Favian*



*Nicol, Marianna, Janis & David*

*More Throssel  
photos of Jukai  
overleaf —*





*Thank you to all the contributors to this issue of the Newsletter.  
Deadline for next issue is the end of July 2010.*





## ***- Events elsewhere in Scotland with the Prior -***

### **May 2010**

Friday 28th	Aberfeldy group evening	6.30-9.30pm
Saturday 29th	Dundee group morning	10am-1pm
Sunday 30th	Aberdeen Day Retreat	10am-4pm

### **June**

Friday 25th	Aberfeldy group evening	7.30-9pm
Saturday 26th	Dundee group morning	10am-1pm
Sunday 27th	Aberdeen Day Retreat	10am-4pm

### **August**

Friday 13th	Aberfeldy group evening	7.30-9pm
Saturday 14th	Dundee group morning	10am-1pm
Sunday 15th	Aberdeen Day Retreat	10am-4pm

### ***For further details please phone :***

<b>Aberdeen</b> –	Bob McGraw or Joyce & Gordon Edward	(01330) 824339 (01467) 681525
<b>Aberfeldy</b> –	Robin Baker	(01887) 820339
<b>Dundee</b> –	Elliott Forsyth	(01333) 451788

# — 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**

Will be held on the second Saturday of each month. A short talk about Buddhist practice and the Serene Reflection Meditation (Soto Zen) tradition. Meditation instruction and discussion.

*Saturday 8th May, 12th June, 10th July, 14th August.*

*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*