

—Portobello Buddhist Priory—



A Temple of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives



*Spring camellias in an Edinburgh garden
(with thanks to Kathleen Campbell)*

Calendar of Events

May-August 2014

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 -

May 2014

Sunday 4th	Wesak	11am
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June

Sunday 1st	Renewal of Precepts	11am
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July

Sunday 20th	Festival of Avalokiteshwara	11am
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August

Sunday 3rd	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.

*(Visitors—please phone beforehand, and please note when the Prior
is holding retreats elsewhere: see inside back page)*

— Prior's Notes —

There is an unfinished work by Michaelangelo that has been named 'The Awakening Giant'. We see the figure emerging from the marble stone which encases it - at least this is the effect, and Michaelangelo describes the artistic process as one of revealing/creating.

I find a resonance in this image of artistic endeavour with our own practice of awakening. The experience of the Soto Zen tradition points us to our reality as Buddha; this can seem counter-intuitive, especially when we feel the weight and constriction of the conditions in our lives, and the sense, at times, of a profound lack at the heart of us. And yet we also have a sense that our lives are not so simply defined by these 'things'; and this is often accompanied by an inner pressure, a motivating force, to explore 'what lies within' and which takes us beyond any conceptual 'grasping after'.

Awareness becomes the artist's tool and a subtle communication with the depths of us is engaged in; a feeling forwards in the dark. As we go on it seems increasingly important that we don't cling to any preconceived ideas or judgments about the emerging form, so it can emerge and be revealed, blow by blow, moment by moment as 'this' the life that comes to us; a life beyond the

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limitations of the 'knowing self', but a life that also embraces that very sense of self. Its expression is Preceptual, 'what is good to do', and again, perhaps counter-intuitively to a separate self-sense, it bears the hallmark of freedom through its capacity to move beyond the motivations of fear and desire. Its life has a larger interconnected canvas, where the 'going within' opens to a 'without' and

in this openness an awakening giant is being revealed; not incomplete, but continually being completed.



Michelangelo's Sleeping Giant

One Thursday night

Taste the taste,
Smell the smell,
Think the think,
Now is the moment,
In which I dwell.
Pride comes first,
Then the fall,
Pick yourself up,
Walk on, but not tall.
Taste the taste,
Type the type,
Sit up straight,
Don't look left, don't look right.
Don't be good,
Don't be bad,
Stay in the middle,
Do the do,
Feel the pain,
Sit upright.

Michael O'Hara

My Buddhist list —

Tonight at the Priory, part of the Dharma talk was about the stages of training. So of course I asked myself ‘what stage am I at?’ I don’t know. But I thought I would work out how my life has changed in the six years that I have been training.

I have written a list. I have always written lists – but I used to feel tied to them. I used to think that freedom would be never writing another list. It took me years to realise that when I don’t have the urge to write a list, it will be because my life will be over. So, I like my lists now.

Here is my list – (this is my third list today):

- My List of how Buddhism has changed my life -

- I let go of things more easily. I can be the tree that stays rooted, while the wind blows – sometimes;
- When I feel fearful (nearly always), I know that sitting with the fear in meditation will help it dissolve. I try and remember ‘Om, to the One who leaps beyond all fear’;
- I am more grateful and feel more joy than I did before. I just have to remember to lift my head from my busy life and look around me;
- I can see how much damage harsh words can do. I am trying to speak more gently;
- I don’t mind doing housework now. I used to think this was a waste of time - now I see it is part of my life.

My life has changed in many more ways, but I am becoming uncomfortable with using the word ‘I’ quite so much, so I am stopping my list, but I wonder what will be on it when I have trained for 10 years.

In gassho

Pam Strachan

Plucking out the heart of the mystery –

Neighbours across the road installed a security light on the side of their house, facing us. I think the intention was for it to point down into their garden and only be activated by movement. However, it pointed straight across the road at us and our adjoining neighbours, and, from about 3pm each day, was permanently on throughout the night until mid-morning the following day.

Coming in and out of our house during the long winter evenings, and in the dark mornings, I became more aware of how intrusive the glare felt. It's one of these situations in which you wonder if you are being too fussy or sensitive: it's only a light, after all. But unless curtains were tightly drawn, the glare leaked into our rooms, and the front of the house was lit up as if by a searchlight. There was something harsh and pitiless about it.

I discussed it with my neighbour, but that's another story. I was surprised how irritated I had become about it; how invasive it felt. For me, light has always had a kind of positive connotation. It seems to equate to truth, to seeing clearly; clarity. The balm of sunshine on your face, the deep peace and companionship of sitting round the glow & flicker of a fire. There is also the spiritual or religious significance of light: banishing darkness or delusion, bright-mindedness. Religious pictures or icons often identify the holy or enlightened figures with a halo, or a general luminosity.

And yet here I wanted to be returned to darkness. My wish reminded me of a poem by the Scottish poet Thomas A. Clark, 'Of Shade and Shadow', the first verse of which is:

*The present age has declared war on shadow - with noise, reason, acid rain.
The impulse that began with the clearing of the forest continues in the demand that
nothing be withheld, no opinion or confidence, no joy or wound.
Reticence is a kind of shade, the foliage around a sacred grove.
Anything continually on show, anything which does not periodically conceal itself, be-
gins to lose definition, to fade into its surroundings, like old paintwork on a shop
front.
If measurement, logic and purpose take their bearings from light, wildness, tender-
ness, profusion, are some of the gifts of shade.*

The poem, perhaps particularly the line ‘*Reticence is a kind of shade, the foliage around a sacred grove*’ suggests that shade and shadow too have their place.

This was in my mind when I listened to a talk in which the speaker quoted Shakespeare’s Hamlet. In Act 3, Hamlet expresses irritation at Guildenstern’s attempts to diagnose the causes of his (Hamlet’s) apparently eccentric behaviour. He suddenly hands Guildenstern a flute, and asks him to play a tune. Guildenstern declines, saying that he doesn’t have the skill. Oh really? says Hamlet – you don’t have the skill to play a flute, but you think you can play me? – or as Shakespeare so much more elegantly expresses it:

Why, look you now, how unworthy a thing you make of me! You would play upon me. You would seem to know my stops. You would pluck out the heart of my mystery. You would sound me from my lowest note to the top of my compass. And there is much music, excellent voice, in this little organ, yet cannot you make it speak? 'Sblood, do you think I am easier to be played on than a pipe? Call me what instrument you will, though you can fret me, yet you cannot play upon me.

By attempting to pluck out the heart of my mystery, how unworthy a thing you make of me, Hamlet says, irritated at the wellsprings of his behaviour being reduced to a simplistic interpretation.

Two thoughts come to me: firstly, it makes me wonder how often I unthinkingly do that – reduce another person to a sentence; another religion to a harsh oversimplification; a complex social issue to a ‘line’; another country to a jaded stereotype – in effect, ‘plucking out the heart of their mystery’.

I know I am not alone in this: as a species, we seem to have a need to make sense of things by simplifying and this is understandable. It might be partly to do with reducing uncertainty. Uncertainty often makes us uncomfortable: we prefer the security of certainty. And yet, as Wendell Berry put it –

*It may be when we no longer know what to do,
we have come to our real work,
and that when we no longer know which way to go,
we have begun our real journey.
The mind that is not baffled is not employed.
The impeded stream is the one that sings*

The poet John Keats used the term ‘negative capability’ in a letter to his brothers to describe what he believed to be essential in a poet, namely to be ‘capable

of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason’.

There is something in that phrase which has echoes of our practice. It seems to me that the process of meditation (in a way I can’t explain) serves as a kind of antidote to simplification. The process of patient attending, or ‘listening with the heart’ as it is sometimes described, seems to be a way of being open to and to acknowledge the shadows, the uncertainties, the fundamental mystery of who we are – and therefore as Great Master Dogen said; ‘to be willing to be disturbed by the Truth’.

Willie Grieve

Photographs from Japan —

Debbie Sheringham kindly sent some photos from her travels in Japan of the two temples with which Great Master Dogen was associated. Hosho-ji (Peak of Light) temple was Dogen's first temple, but it was burnt down by a rival Buddhist sect. It was subsequently rebuilt.



Hosho-ji gate



Hosho-ji zendo

Dogen then went on to found Eihei-ji in 1244. It is a training monastery. It is most closely associated with Dogen, and his ashes are in the Founder's Hall there. It too has been destroyed and rebuilt on a number of occasions.



Eihei-ji monastery



Representation of Great Master Dogen at Nanjoji



Eihei-ji altar

Various Positions



Rev Master Daishin tells us in his book *Buddha Recognizes Buddha* that the poem - *The Most Excellent Mirror Samadhi* - has as its central theme the five stages of training, the last of which is enlightenment. The second stage is where we as trainees take the precepts during Jukai and in accepting the wagesa, make a commitment to live our lives according to the teachings of Lord Buddha. Rev Master Jiyu called this stage the 'long littleness', a reference perhaps to a position that we can occupy for a long time without seeming to make any progress in our training.

This 'long littleness' struck a chord with me in relation to my own training. My regular meditation practice has shown me how to let go, how to sit in acceptance of conditions as they arise and not turn away. Through the generosity of our Prior's Dharma talks I have gained a better understanding of formal

Buddhist teachings and even ‘stuck’ in the ‘long littleness’, it feels like I am making progress in my training. Then something happens to upset my smug equilibrium and all hell breaks loose, normally ending with an apology, quicker than ever in the past and always genuine, followed (nearly) always by a return to some form of steady breathing. This, I believe is predicated on faith, a willingness just to get on with it without overly questioning my myriad imperfections.

Sometimes when I get up in the morning and in particular when its dark outside and I’ve been working long hours, I wonder what I’m doing, why I go through this meditation routine every day. My simple answer is that I’m a Buddhist and this is what Buddhists do. That’s what it feels like to me to be in the ‘long littleness’.

Although I am hesitant declaring myself occupying any particular position, it was the first stage that set me thinking. How did I get here, what moved me to seek out answers to questions that I had been pondering since I was a child. When I really thought about it I could not come up with a definitive answer, but something had happened, an imperceptible shift had occurred. At some point a small turning of the mind had taken place, or perhaps many turnings too little to notice had happened over a long time. Maybe nothing of significance had occurred and a random series of causes and effects had led me to Buddhism as my chosen religion.

But my belief is that there is something within me that responded to a call that came from somewhere and I can’t be more precise than that.

Entry Level

As I walked on Blackford Hill

something happened-

as if for the first time seen,

a blue more vivid sky.

Each crystal splash of water

heard clear. Blood coursing

through my veins, heard too.

I was extinguished by the world,

no - not exactly, - not even.

I was scattered in the wind,
swirled back together, melded.
It seemed life flowed through me
filling me with bright gratitude
for the green wild garlic
and smell of yellow gorse,
white blossom, black earth.
As I walked on Blackford Hill
something happened.

David Campbell

Jukai 2014

It was a bright breezy morning when Tom and I said our farewells to Rev Favian and set out along the A68 towards Hexham.

The mist had set in by the time we reached the roller coaster roads of Northumbria. About half a mile away from the Abbey Tom told me that this was about the time he started to get nervous. My reply was that I'd been feeling nervous for the past few weeks. There was all the training that lay ahead. That added to my nerves, but what had been on my mind most was the step into the unknown, the commitment and magnitude of taking the precepts. I don't pretend to fully grasp the impact of it yet. That is something that will take time as it slowly filters

through my life. It was comforting to get to Throssel and find that many, if not all, of the new ordinaees felt the same way.

In addition to the sitting, ceremonies and lectures of a retreat Jukai has a series of its own unique ceremonies, which were incredibly moving and beautiful experiences. A large part of the abbey was transformed into a curtained maze of shrines for the unforgettable Sange ceremony. Words really cannot describe Sange, it was an awe inspiring and powerful experience. The effort the Monks put into the ceremonies was amazing. Somehow the Abbey managed to continue as normal amongst all the chaos. Pots



and pans still got washed up, floors still got mopped. Despite all the alterations in the ceremony hall we still got to bed by half nine ... and were ready for it.

Rev Willard and Rev Berwyn had wry looks on their faces on the day when we followed the precepts in procession. The ceremony was mentioned at the top of the day's schedule, but no time was allotted for it. They explained that when it happened we would know about it, should drop everything and follow the precepts. When Rev Master Haryo began the procession there was a flurry of people pulling on shoes outside the guest department. Outside the wind had picked up and battered us as

we processed over the barren Northumbrian landscape. The chant surfaced and fell beneath the wind in waves.

I also spent time in considering what had brought me to Jukai. In one of the tea and talks Rev Master Leandra raised the subject and got me thinking. The path is different for every one of us, of course. Some had arrived via Christianity, for others it was Theravada. In my case it was philosophy. During my studies I read Alan Watts ... and then put the book down, but something stayed with me. I have never had a Saul on the road to Damascus moment, over the years Zen has quietly gathered size and momen-

tum in my life. Rev Master Leandra emphasised acceptance and respect for the path that led us here, rather than an attitude that views previous beliefs as redundant or worthless. This also resonated with me. I've recently revisited some of my old philosophical haunts. And while my attitude has changed, those old haunts were very formative in my life and I owe them a debt of gratitude.

I don't fully know my motivations for taking the precepts. I could say that experience has taught the bitter lesson of what happens when I don't follow them. On a more positive note, I could say that I want to cherish truth and life. Neither hit the mark, though. Something grabbed me and pulled me along in the direction of Jukai. I followed. One of the phrases that stuck with me through the week was "let it be what it is." I'm not sure now if it was mentioned early in the week or whether it came from a talk I listened to before the retreat. But the phrase really summed things up for me. Not just Jukai, but training in general: a deep acceptance of what is and a willingness to sit with it ... whatever it is.

Its difficult to describe Jukai. I've hardly done it justice. It was an event that moved everyone: new ordainees, returners and monks alike. The week was a very special one. It's something I'll be digesting for years to come. It's a guide and an inspiration. I'll finish by saying just how grateful I am to Rev Master Favian, the monks of Throssel and the Portobello Sangha for all the support and encouragement.

In gassho

Alaric Pether



*Thank you to all the contributors to this issue of the Newsletter.
Deadline for next issue is mid-August 2014*





- Events elsewhere in Scotland with the Prior -

May 2014

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

June

6th-8th	Scottish Sangha Weekend	
Friday 20th	Aberfeldy	7.30-9pm
Saturday 21st	Dundee group morning	10am-1pm
Sunday 22nd	Aberdeen Morning Retreat	10am-1pm

(please note this weekend may be cancelled if Rev Master Haryo comes to Portobello, in which case a day retreat/gathering will take place there)

July

Sunday 6th	Inverness	10am-4pm
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August

Friday 8th	Aberfeldy	7.30-9pm
Saturday 9th	Dundee	10am-1pm
Sunday 10th	Aberdeen	10am-1pm

For further details please phone :

Aberdeen -	Bob McGraw or Joyce & Gordon Edward	(01330) 824339 (01467) 681525
Aberfeldy -	Robin Baker	(01887) 820339
Dundee -	Elliott Forsyth	(01333) 451788
Highland -	Calum Finlay	(01463) 870331

— Day-to-day schedule at Portobello Buddhist Priory —

Daily (*Every day except Mondays, Thursday afternoons & Sunday p.m.*)

MORNING

7.00 Meditation

7.40 Morning service

EVENING

7.30 Meditation

7.55 Walking meditation

8.00 Meditation

8.30 Evening office

Early morning practice

You can come for early morning meditation, followed by short morning service.

*7.00am –
8.15am*

Evening practice

Meditation, walking meditation, meditation, evening office.
You are welcome to stay on for tea.

*7.30pm –
8.45pm*

Introductory afternoons

- are usually held on the second Saturday of each month. A short talk will be given about Buddhist practice and the Serene Reflection Meditation (Soto Zen) tradition, with meditation instruction and discussion.
Saturday 10th May, 14th June, 12th July, 9th 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 Master Favian Straughan*