

—Portobello Buddhist Priory—



A Temple of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives



Travelling Bodhisattva, Shasta Abbey

Calendar of Events September-December 2010

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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 Favian, Prior

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

- Weekend events at the Priory -

September 2010

Sunday 19th	Renewal of Precepts	11am
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October

Sunday 17th	Festival of our Founder, Rev Master Jiyu	11am
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November

Sunday 28th	Festival of the Buddha's Enlightenment	11am
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December

Friday 31st	New Year Festival	7.30pm- 10.30pm
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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)*

News/letter

no. 36

August 2010

— Prior's Notes —

“I want all the sweets in the world”, I heard a 4 year old boy say. I recognised my own wanting and the voice of humanity: to want it all. The boy would make himself sick in the attempt and we, perhaps with our more sophisticated desires, are still ignorant of how to be happy and suffer in our attempts. We tend to substitute self-awareness for a merry-go-round of pleasure seeking/ pain avoiding, and end up not very merry. Happiness is a tricky thing - with blind seeking it too easily becomes a consumer object out there or perhaps a spiritual ideal ‘in here’ but always a goal to be achieved by ‘me’.

Zazen allows this ‘thirst’ to show itself - both the desired object, the sweets/ perfect partner/health/ enlightenment; and if we pay attention, also the gap, that hollow sense of lacking that we feel driven to fill up. And right there in outline is the recognisable form of our lives.

Buddhism might substitute ‘non-grasping’ for ‘happy’ and Zazen meditation gives us a space and an orientation for letting go of the blind grasping. We get to see, to awaken to how the mind-game plays out its repeated grasping and rejecting, and how this tense polarity is essential in maintaining the sense of ‘me’ at the heart of the show.

It's important that we don't let this awareness foster a judging tone of rejection

Inside this issue-

<i>Gratitude —</i>	2
<i>The Earth is Golden</i>	3
<i>Here Is Now — a poem</i>	4
<i>Inner Silence and Awakening</i>	5
<i>The Precepts in Everyday Life</i>	7
<i>Practice in the Highlands —</i>	9

of something called the self, as this is just more of the same old grasping/rejecting reflex. Sitting still with this self-knowledge and desire can allow them to shift and open to a sense of present moment sufficiency, where we discover we don't need to grasp.

There is a paradox we come to face: that the more we grasp after the world, the more we exclude ourselves from it; narrowing our lives to a series of self-maintaining reflexes, and a mind/ heart not at peace. Alternatively a practice of attention and letting go opens us to the reality of

our interconnected lives, expressing what is good to do and not simply what I want.

We get to have the sweets and are happy to pass them around.

Gratitude —

I have so much to be grateful for in my training this year. Most importantly, in April I took the Precepts at the Jukai retreat at Throssel Hole Abbey. Thinking back, I realise that the whole wonderful and enriching experience was made possible for me by the monks who planned and provided for every detail of the retreat, physical and spiritual, and by my fellow trainees who took part in the process of Jukai, sharing in the joys and surprises and supporting each other throughout with warmth and consideration.

How can I adequately show gratitude for and to each person who showed me such kindness and consideration during Jukai, and also in all other areas of my life? It was only this week that I realised that Dogen Zenji provides an answer in Shushogi, the most important text for Jukai.

I had already read the following words during the retreat, but not taken them in. 'Because of consideration for others on the part of Buddhas and Ancestors, we are enabled to see the Buddha now and hear his teachings' - 'You

need no further teachings than the above in order to show gratitude, and you must show it truly, in the only real way, in your daily life; our daily life should be spent in selfless activity with no waste of time whatsoever.'¹

I should have known that it would all lead back to 'ceaseless training'! But now I can show gratitude, be truly grateful, *to all to whom it is due, not just those people I know about*, and not just by a word or a feeling, but at every moment of the day, by the way I live my life!

When Rev. Favian asked me if I was thinking about contributing to this issue of the Portobello Buddhist Priory Newsletter, I said that I had thought about it, but I had no 'message' to give. 'What about gratitude?' he asked. Gratitude? Now there's a good message! Thank you, Rev. Favian!

Marianna Buultjens

¹ Dogen Zenji, Shushogi (What is truly meant by Training and Enlightenment) in Roshi P.T.N.H. Jiyu-Kennett (1999), Zen is Eternal

The Earth is Golden —

I have been reading a book by Dainin Katagiri called '*You Have To Say Something*', and it started me thinking about the floods in Pakistan, the War in Afghanistan and the numerous other painful and sad situations around the world, and as he most eloquently puts it; 'It's not only the mountains and rivers that are polluted - everything seems contaminated, disabled and ruined'.

Where does peace and harmony really fit into all of this? Dogen says the earth is golden and the rivers run with sweet milk. This is truly hard to comprehend when watching the news or reading of the latest disaster, and where do I fit into all of this if I want to lead a spiritual life?

At times one can't help but feel utterly powerless, but I'm beginning to realize that it is only when we see things from our own narrow perspective that life seems overwhelming and confusing. And despite all the disasters, wars and travesties there is always a desire to make a beautiful life and a perfect world for others, made of peace tranquillity and harmony. But how can this come about when there is so much pain and misery and the obstacles seem insurmountable?

Dogen likened life to 'riding in a boat', and sometimes we are carried along, with very little idea as to where we are going, and at times quite content to trust to a sense of fate to lead the way as we sail along with fingers crossed within our own ocean of life.

But sometimes we fail to realize that our boat has a tiller and oars. That it is within us to respond to the feel of the wind and the sail and direct our own lives even in the smallest of ways. To make a difference by opening our hearts to the real conditions and beauty that surrounds us, not in massive gestures, but in small ways by doing what is good to do here and now; by being mindful with even the simplest and smallest of activities and tasks; by accepting and valuing life and all sentient beings; by understanding that life has favourable and sometimes unfavourable conditions. And when we accept this wholeheartedly, the universe in its entirety is as Dogen described - 'The earth is golden and the rivers run with sweet milk.'

What a wonderful world this really is if we only take time to look and attend, and are not so preoccupied by our own desires and fears.

Gabriele Smith

Here is Now

*For my mother May Campbell
29.10.31 – 20.7.10*

Here we are
Now we live
Not in yesterday
With its - if onlys
And what ifs.

Here we are
Now we live
Not in tomorrow
With its promises
And wishes.

Here we are
Now we die
Today we live
Plunged in sorrow
And joy.

Here we live
Now we are
Bound together
Forever
In life we live.

David Campbell

Inner Silence and Awakening – a Christian/Buddhist Retreat

Earlier this year I attended a Christian/Buddhist retreat with my wife, Margaret. The retreat was held at Turvey Abbey, a Benedictine community in Bedfordshire. The Abbey is home to about ten nuns and there is an attached monastery with just two (male) monks. The retreat was led jointly by one of the nuns and by a follower of the Buddhist Chan school which is the Chinese version of Zen.

The retreat was centred around the Christian practice of *Lectio Divina*, essentially a type of meditation that is widely used both in the Catholic monastic setting and also by lay Christians of various denominations. Christians usually use a biblical passage as the subject of their *Lectio* but any spiritual writings can be used. For this retreat, the writings of Meister Eckhart, a 13th century Christian mystic, were chosen as the basis of the *Lectio*. The reason for this choice for a joint Christian/Buddhist retreat is that Meister Eckhart is well regarded by contemplative Christians and by Buddhists and his style has a very zen flavour, although the vocabulary is Christian. For example, he writes:

“We shall also find God in our most menial tasks. Indeed, when we perform a menial task with the same spiritual care as we perform our worship, then God will shine in us equally in both.”

Lectio Divina takes the form: **Lectio – Meditatio – Oratio – Contemplatio**.

- 1) **Lectio**: the selected passage was read out three times by three different people. It was impressed on us that, although *lectio* means ‘reading’, it is more about ‘listening’. During the reading, people silently choose a word or a phrase or a sentence that they find spiritually significant. It is often more as though the word or phrase chooses itself.
- 2) **Meditatio**: this involves mindful repetition of the word or phrase to oneself. This is chewing over and absorbing the words and their meaning for oneself rather than thinking intellectually about them.
- 3) **Oratio**: flowing directly from the *Meditatio*, this is an interior, personal response to the chosen words. For Christians this will be some form of prayer. I found the natural thing to do, anticipating the next stage, was to meditate whilst not forgetting the chosen words.

4) **Contemplatio**: this stage is silent meditation – essentially zazen.

This was all done with the group together, with the leader guiding us through the different stages. It took about 45 minutes to an hour, after which people could, if they wanted, briefly share with the group something of what they had experienced.

There is another stage following on from the Lectio process which is sometimes called **Actio**. This (as with zazen) refers to taking the fruits of meditation into one's active life.

We did the Lectio four times during the weekend retreat and I found that the process created a conducive environment for zazen. For me it involved an unfamiliar approach and so gave a new perspective on our core practice. As with zazen, I found that my response to the Lectio varied, sometimes being a settled experience and sometimes not.

We did one session of walking meditation which was a little different from

the OBC version, as it consisted of walking at varying speeds and ended with waving our arms about while we walked, not a completely comfortable experience for all the retreatants.

There was also the opportunity during the retreat to attend the monastic offices (ceremonies) or, alternatively, to do some meditation. I did some of both while Margaret followed the monastic timetable.

There were about twenty people on the retreat and they included Buddhists, Christians (of various denominations) and some who were somewhere in between. The experience reinforced my awareness of how much common ground there is between the more contemplative Christian approaches and Zen Buddhism. When we see beyond the externals we find that our different traditions offer many riches that can be shared in seeking the Way.

Anthony Linforth



The Precepts in Everyday Life – the musings of a novice

Full of the inner peace and equanimity that can come from a **good morning meditation** I entered Real Foods in the pursuit of buying food (and only so much that can actually be used!), food that comes from – I hope it is true – origins that care about the environment, our planet. As I get to the till the lovely sales assistant points out to me that I could/should return the red pepper, as it shows a tiny spot of mould at the bottom.

Now, unthinkingly and only vaguely aware of the a) laziness within (do I want to bother?) b) internal conviction that, whilst perfectly in my right (after all am I getting my money's worth?), I decide that it is really not necessary. The lovely sales assistant seems to be very convinced that I should – I remain firm: it did really not bother me.

This incident made me smile when back home, munching on this pepper, I recalled the incident. The sales assistant must have known something about Precept 5, I thought. I felt grateful for this, but alongside I became aware of something different: a sense of internal grumble. Where on earth would this vegetable go if I had returned it and taken a perfect one? Would it have been thrown away? Would it hence have nourished someone who feeds from restaurants' and shops' backyards? Would a member of staff less well off than me have managed to buy a cheaper pepper? Or would it have gone back and another unsuspecting victim with less luck than me been sold this item? I'll never know..... And off I went on the track of an internal rant regarding today's world and sense of injustice, and people's sense of entitlement, etc.: I became restless and forgot all about the food I was eating. By then all sense of 'thinking deeply of the ways and means this food has come' was lost and I was teetering over the edge of falling into the pit of angry response to the 'big bad world'.

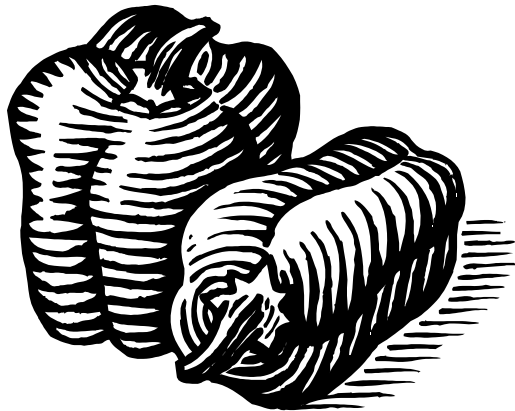
I was glad to catch myself in time and realised this is me clinging to what I think is right or wrong. I became drawn into separating out, introducing a division between myself and the 'world', with (which is even worse) me being the good one, as if I had never indulged in a sense of entitlement. In no time and in my naivety with nothing but good intentions, I had become temporarily possessed with my own conviction, with what *I* thought. I became proud.

So, what is good to do or not is far from easy to decide. The pepper was dam-

aged, either way someone has eaten it and benefitted from its goodness. The full money paid for it will see that the organisation continues to be able to pay its staff members and should someone ever tell me they are hungry, I will be more than happy to feed them. This is good enough, surely?

I could have responded in many different ways. My intention was a mixed bag of not wanting to think and a strong inner conviction that I do not need to have the perfect piece: 'I take what I am offered'. In recounting this episode here I understand that, in that moment, I certainly did pre-consciously do good – the *intention* was good. Without slipping into self delusion and copping out I remind myself that whichever way the decision went, the truth with all its possible consequences is simple: the pepper had a mouldy patch. This is how it was – and it fed one person very adequately.

Jacqueline Egli



Practice in the Highlands —

The Highlands of Scotland is a beautiful place to live and

work but one of the problems for a lay buddhist trainee living here is the sheer remoteness of the area from the nearest priory or meditation group.

With Portobello being a 6 hour round trip and Throssel Hole Abbey being an 11 hour round trip, I have often felt a bit disconnected from the greater body of the OBC Sangha. Of course, one can only try to do the best they can to train in the circumstances that arise. For me, I have found it important to try to make it down to Throssel at least 2 or 3 times a year. I am also extremely grateful to have the opportunity of telephoning a monk at Throssel whenever I am encountering a serious difficulty and feel the need for some guidance or else just want to talk with another person who I know is training wholeheartedly.

Although this contact has given me enough of a sense of sangha to sustain my training, I have always thought how wonderful it would be to have a local sangha meeting regularly in the Highlands. Over the past year, the Guest Department at Throssel had informed me of several trainees living in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland who had a connection to the OBC and so I decided to try and make

contact with them. I also designed a website to try and find any other people in the area who were familiar with serene reflection meditation as taught by the OBC. To my great delight I received 7 responses from people expressing an interest in attending a group meeting. Many of these people also expressed a similar feeling of isolation in living so far away from any meditation groups or priories. As such, I decided to take the plunge and set up the Highland Zen Group whose purpose would be to try to create and develop a sense of local sangha for all OBC trainees living in the Highlands.

I spent several frustrating months in finding a suitable room to hire in Inverness where we could facilitate a meeting but finally, on Sunday 13th June 2010, the Highland Zen Group had its first meeting at the Volunteering Highland Centre In Inverness. It was attended by 6 trainees from locations as diverse as Forres, Plockton and Tomintoul. The first group meeting was deemed to be a success and we have decided to continue meeting on a monthly basis. It was felt that due to the large travelling distances involved (up to 150 miles round trip for some) anything more frequent than once a month would be unfeasible. We would also like to facilitate a Sunday day

event at some point in the future which would permit another trainee, Martin from Stornoway, to join us.

Everyone at the Highland Zen Group is excited at finally having the chance to meet and practice with other trainees in the Highlands and we look forward to exploring ways in which we can deepen our connection with each other and develop our local sangha in

the future. On behalf of the Highland Zen Group, I would like to say 'hello' to everyone in the greater Scottish Sangha.

Calum Findlay

Inverness

Website : www.spanglefish.com/highlandzengroup



Left to right: Shooie, Linda, Ken, Ann and Calum at the first Highland Zen Group meeting on 13th June 2010.



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





- Events elsewhere in Scotland with the Prior -

October 2010

Friday 29th	Aberfeldy group evening	7.30-9pm
Saturday 30th	Dundee group morning	10am-1pm
Sunday 31st	Aberdeen Day Retreat	10am-4pm

November

Friday 19th	Aberfeldy group evening	7.30-9pm
Saturday 20th	Dundee group morning	10am-1pm
Sunday 21st	Aberdeen Day Retreat	10am-4pm

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

— 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 11th September, 9th October, 13th November, 11th December.

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*