

—Portobello Buddhist Priory—



A Temple of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives



*Buddha Preaching the First Sermon at Sarnath
(India (Bihar, probably Nalanda 11th century))
Metropolitan Museum of Art. Public Domain (CC0)*

Newsletter September-December 2026

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Newsletter

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Please note: the Priory website at www.portobellobuddhist.org.uk has an up to date schedule of events at the Priory. Group visits around Scotland will be arranged on a case by case basis by the Prior.

We'll continue coming together for meditation, dharma and ceremony on the Zoom platform each Wednesday evening. We also physically meet in the Priory on Sunday mornings.

Again, please consult the Priory website for the most up to date information.

— *Prior's Notes* —

The Sangha Refuge

- a reflection following our St. Drostan's Summer retreat

To take refuge in the Sangha is to recognise that while meditation is a deeply personal practice, it is not a solitary one. We are relational beings, and the people with whom we choose to spend our time, as some of us did recently on our Summer retreat, shapes our attitudes, habits, and capacity for well-being and awakening. Our Retreat provided a space where we could show up as we are, without needing to pretend or perform. It reminded us that we are not alone in facing the challenges of being human.

A Buddhist Sangha encourages presence, compassion, and wise action. It is built not only on shared beliefs but on shared intention: the willingness to meet experience with openness, curiosity, and kindness. Within such a community, we learn not only from the dharma but also from one another. Each

person's struggles, insights, and willingness to train become part of a collective effort and a learning process, that takes place in the very daily acts of kitchen work, formal meditation and social engagement.

Refuge in the Sangha is an acknowledgment of our interdependence. We support others by listening deeply, speaking honestly, and responding with empathy, and in doing so we discover that these same qualities nourish us in return. The community can become a living expression of Buddha Nature, one in which compassionate awareness is cultivated together and naturally extends beyond the boundaries of the retreat into that of our families, workplaces, and the wider world.

In this way, Sangha is not simply a place we go; it is a way of belonging that helps each of us awaken more fully to life.



MSO

I seem to have an unending capacity to invent in my mind elaborate stories that begin with *what if* or *if only I had* or *they should not have* and very often *This isn't the way I planned it!* Recently when Rev. Favian mentioned the phrase The Drama of the Mind, I was reminded of a way I came up with a few years ago to describe this; my Mental Soap Opera. I seem to have an enormous capacity for inventing these MSOs in practically any situation. And then I try to impose them on what is actually happening. It gets exhausting.

A very close friend died three days before Christmas. It is the day after her funeral service, and her family and close friends are driving to her burial at Binning Woodland Burial Site near North Berwick. The cortege comprises a hearse and two black limousines. There was not going to be enough room for everyone in the limousines, so we were asked to join the cortege to take some of the family members. It is a coincidence our car is black, which seemed fitting. Pat is driving the car and once the hearse arrived and everyone else has got into the limousines, we are ready to drive slowly down St Stephen Street. The hearse and limousines set off at a stately pace and just as Pat is putting our car into gear, a green car which is parked on the double yellow line opposite abruptly pulls out and barges in front of us and sets off behind the second limousine. This is when my mind begins to generate a new MSO. *How inconsiderate! That's not how it should be! Our four black vehicles are a cortege! The green car should be aware of this! This is **our** story!*

All these thoughts were going through my head. But we hope the *intruding* green car will soon turn off in a different direction and go on its way. St Stephen Street turns into St Vincent Street, and I assume that the inconsiderate green car will head up Howe Street, but it also turns into Great King Street, which provides more fuel for my MSO. *How infuriating. It's still messing up the cor-*

tege. This is our story. And yes, as we travel around Drummond Place and London Street it is still there following the cortege and ruining **my** plan *of how it should be!*

We take two more turnings, both of which gave the green car many possibilities for turning elsewhere and by the time we are on London Road it eventually begins to dawn on me that the green car is possibly part of the cortege. My MSO makes a hundred and eighty turnaround in its plot. Of course! *It's not the enemy! It's one of us! We are both part of the same story! We are part of a team. It is no longer an intruder.* There is nothing to be gained by trying to pass it because it is *one of us.*

We are now happily following the green car and at Jocks Lodge we both get in the right-hand lane to turn into Willowbrae Road, before we notice that the hearse and limousines have chosen the left-hand lane and are travelling straight on. But there is nothing to worry about because we can follow the green car. *We have a bond. We are a team.*

And once we are on the A1, we find that the hearse and limousines are somehow up ahead of us and our cortege has happily reconfigured itself into *the way it should be.*

Eventually we all arrive at Binning Wood and as we get out of our car, I see that the Green Car has been driven by the loving daughter-in-law of my departed friend, who we have all come together to bury in this beautiful beech woodland burial ground. It's hard to believe now how in the last hour I have cast someone who I love in so many differing roles in my MSO. Everyone here has come to this wood to pay our last respects to our dear departed friend.

There is only one role that always stays central in all my MSOs. It's always about **ME**. It's always **my** story. The belief that the world should rotate around **me**. I try to imagine what it would be like if I lived in the knowledge that every moment that life grants me is an opportunity to inhabit that very moment, rather than to create and elaborate these fantasy scenarios, which frequently lead me to act on information and beliefs which can be either distorted or are just plain wrong.

Meanwhile I will keep sitting.

Julian Goodacre

Just after writing this piece, I stumbled by chance on this quote from the Buddhist scholar Geshe Shawopa;

***‘Do not rule over imaginary kingdoms of
endlessly proliferating possibilities.’***



Reflections on Buddhist practice at 80

What does Buddhist practice

offer? Well, not a helping hand paying those ever-growing bills, or help with those aches and pains of old age etc.

But for me, it turned those empty words like empathy, compassion, humility into life-changing experiences. It enabled those painful situations I can't change to become situations of acceptance; and it provided an opportunity to respect people who have different views, beliefs and cultures, through an awareness of our interconnection. And it led to a deepening understanding of the need to maybe see the bigger picture.

We live in a world that still offers us so many opportunities to be a better person. But at the same time, we sometimes need a helping hand to make those changes possible.

There were times I found the practice hard to understand and even harder to follow. Situations where the old hab

its would creep back in and then the guilt of *"I shouldn't have said that or done that"* would arise. And the times when sitting was painful, not just physically but mentally.

This year I will be 80. And like everyone else life has had its ups and downs. But having a practice that offered a way to look at my life, not in a judgemental way, but with an understanding of our human weakness, has been so helpful. And that practice has also offered an opportunity to grow in a way that benefits not just me but others.

So what does Buddhist practice offer? In a world that is ever-changing, I believe it's a practice that respects our differences while offering loving-kindness and hope. Plus a deeper acceptance of what it means to be human.

Gabriele Smith

Sesshin

Mid-afternoon, we sit by the window,
two strangers together, watching the rain fall
trace of tall pines outlined in the distance.

After a long while, she touches the silence
with words spoken so gently I lean close
to receive them: *Such a lovely stillness.*

Alex Reed



*Summer retreat at St Drostan's, Tarfside -
visitors, wildfire and mouse*

We congregated for this year's retreat at St Drostan's on a warm Friday. Coming to the centre for the third year, with many having attended before, there's familiarity with its facilities; and the Zendo was set up as though it had been there since last time.

It offered a calm, bright space, with windows on three sides and by 7pm, mats, benches and chairs were occupied and we began sitting.

The opportunity to sit for longer, to participate in services and to remain silent for a while loosens the hold of the daily concerns and inner conversations. With each sitting, I found myself settling, quietening, slowing. Yet with senses sharpening.

Then, during the sitting on Saturday morning came voices from outside the building. Some larking lads, curious about the statuary they could see within, approached. A shouted exclamation:

"One of them moved !!!"

Then a demand for attention, as they asked *"Is everything all right?"*

Rev. Favian rose from his seat, left the Zendo to open the fire door in the corridor outside. *"We're fine"*, he said; *"We're meditating in here."*

His voice, measured, just loud enough for them to hear, was firm and benevolent.

The interaction was unexpected on both sides. A little event, skilfully handled. I wonder if those lads are even more curious now.

During the weekend, not very far away, a wildfire was burning in the Cairngorms. On Saturday afternoon, walking on the hill after lunch, its smoke was visible as a haze and detectable to the nose. I felt a wave of upset at the tragedy

of lost landscape, perished wildlife, saddened people, with maybe a culprit who could be blamed for carelessly leaving a flame. At the same time, letting go a cherished ideal of the way the world 'should be', I could also see this as a natural event. A change which will cause further changes. Nature regrows. Life responds. The universe continues unfolding.

On Sunday came the final walking meditation, the route of which followed a path around the building towards St Drostan's church. Careful feet, one pair after the next, stepping slowly, rhythmically. Treading so gently that a field mouse allowed at least ten pairs of feet to pass by within touching distance before it went bounding away.

I don't think the owners of any of those feet failed to notice the little mouse. There was something about its not noticing us, occupying the same patch of ground for a few moments. It was there, and then it left.

Shutting the door of the centre, a little sadness washes over. It's easy to feel attachment to the summer retreats. They offer a kind space to practice and to learn from other Sangha members.

I can feel a pull already hoping to have the opportunity to come again. Hmm, it seems there's quite a bit of grasping coming over me. I smile and lock the door.

Just like the mouse, we were there. Then we left. To continue our training.

Jane Stephen



What a Treat to be on Retreat - St Drostan's

I am always surprised by how just a few days away on retreat can make such a difference to one's outlook and attitude to life. Maybe it's just being able to opt out of the day-to-day routine; to be able to sample silence and reflection in a perfectly beautiful spot. Add to that the company of gracious and considerate Sangha, excellent food, the opportunity for a brisk walk to touch the nearby hills and it really doesn't get much better. Many thanks again to everyone who makes this wonderful retreat possible.

Annie Edwards



Highland Retreat

On 18 July eight of us from the **Highland Zen Group** met for a day retreat at Ed Garrett's home in stunning countryside near Grantown on Spey.

Ed and Neil Craig organised the day, including a silent lunch which is unusual for our retreat days but was much appreciated by some.

This is the second DIY summer retreat we have had at Ed's and it fills the gap helpfully between our retreat days led by Revd Finnan in the spring and autumn of every year.

Many thanks to Ed and Neil, who are busy organising another similar day at end September!

Ann Milston





With thanks to Karen Valentine

The Pilgrimage of Returning Home

As I lay my karma on the altar

I realise I'm not who I thought I was
And wonder if I'm on my way home.
There are way-markers on the altar
And in the monastery grounds.
This Pilgrimage may last a lifetime
Or start and end in the blinking of an eye.
Soft splashing waves seem far away
On Po 'Ta La island, Avalokeshvara's home.
If I shut my eyes I can sense the breath
Of the ocean, the terns' screams
And the moon's firm push and pull.

At the first shrine I place the residue
Of my former deluded acts.
I walk reverentially to the second shrine
And cleanse my body in a silver waterfall.
The third shrine is beside a handkerchief tree

Where tears of remorse water its roots.

The fourth shrine is next to a crucible
Where I offer a hyper-vigilant fist.

The fifth shrine is where the sun rises
Where I offer the song of a blackbird.

The sixth shrine is a mirror
Where I see my former lives.

The seventh shrine is a roaring fire
Throw in the weeds of cynicism and ill-will!

The eighth and last shrine is guarded
By a Bodhisattva with a thousand eyes
Here I offer everything I think I am
And touch my brow to the earth.

Eric Nicholson



With thanks to Karen Valentine

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