

—*Portobello Buddhist Priory*—



A Temple of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives



Spring morning in woodland

Newsletter May—August 2023

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Newsletter

74th edition
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(& 34th e-edition)

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, and on Sunday mornings at the Priory. Again, please consult the Priory website for the most up to date information.

— *Prior's Notes* —

Turning Words' in the Zen tradition are usually associated with koans, where the teacher speaks a 'live language,' or acts in a way that helps blow through confused and distracted thoughts and 'turns' the practitioner towards awakening. There are also, in a more familiar sense, those moments in everyone's life where the presence, words and gestures of another, in retrospect, are seen to have helped turn the mind towards a more wholesome and true engagement with themselves and the world. It is in this sense I'd like to borrow the phrase 'turning words' to illustrate an encounter I had with a dear monk no longer with us, who, looking back, helped orientate the direction of my practice.

The first Throssel monk I ever met was Rev. Master Saido, who was visiting the Newcastle Meditation Group, back in the 1980's. I had just started coming along and during the tea and questions I found myself painting a rather dark picture of the human condition, with its history of wars, hatred and violence. Reflecting back upon it, I seemed to be in a bit of a cul-de-sac then, unable to find a meaningful take on it all.

When I finished speaking, I remember there seemed a long pause where I was struck by the quality of Rev. Saido's silent presence; his bright eyes and compassionate face, with just the hint of mischievous humour. Then he said quietly; "You can do something about it." This seemed to result in an upsurge of relief, where something in me seemed to recognise the truth of these words. It was as though I'd been waiting a long time for permission to really accept them.

Rev. Saido went on to walk us through the teaching of the Four Noble Truths, with great clarity and humour.

I'm forever grateful. Thank you, Rev. Master Saido.



Aberdeenshire Group celebrates their first birthday —

It is hard to believe that our group, which meets in Stonehaven, Aberdeenshire, has now been meeting for one year. The development of the group has been fascinating to watch and let me tell you the story of our first year.

We had a regular group that met for many years in Aberdeen. We used to meet every Monday night for meditation at the Quaker meeting hall. On top of this Reverend Favian would visit us several times each year and hold a half day retreat at one of our homes. The Monday nights fell away just prior to covid and then everything stopped with covid!

During covid I was struck by how much I missed the group and sitting with other people. It really hit home to me why the Sangha is considered as one of the three jewels in Buddhism. I realised there is something special sitting with other people who are also committed to Buddhism, meditation and trying to live a good life.

Because I missed these regular meetings with my Sangha brothers and sisters, I decided to try and revive a group in the northeast once again and was thankful that my good friend Dave Inkster was willing to help. I then wondered if the previous group members might be keen to revive the group and if so, where should we meet? Although the group used to meet in Aberdeen I was aware that many Sangha members lived just outside the city in Aberdeenshire. So, I sent out an email asking people if they first wanted a group again and if so where should it meet. Thankfully the replies that came back indicated that there was appetite to revive the group. People wanted to meet somewhere they could drive to easily and had links to public transport and it didn't have to be Aberdeen.

I was aware of a fantastic charity, called The Haven, that I am involved with in the village of Stonehaven about 15 miles south of Aberdeen. They have a well-being centre which hosts all kinds of activities such as yoga, Qigong, martial arts, shamanic drumming groups and different kinds of therapies. The wellbe-

ing centre has an amazingly peaceful energy to it, and I thought this would be a great place to meet. It can be easily reached by car and has a bus stop near the door. The Haven has now become our meeting place and now one year on I think we chose well.

During the first two or three months we had an incredible level of interest in the group. It was slightly overwhelming for a while with up to 25 people attending any given night. But after six months or so things settled down a bit and we have ended up with a core of about 15 to 20 people who attend the group on a semi regular basis. We average about 8 to 10 people each week.

We now also use The Haven for half day retreats when Reverend Favian visits. We are trying to hold half day retreats roughly every couple of months. These have been very well attended with 12 – 15 people normally in attendance.

When we first started the group I was worried that there might not be enough interest to make a success of it. I have been delighted to see it flourish and develop into such a harmonious and well attended group. In fact, Thursday night is often the highlight of my week now and it feels like a positive constant that I look forward to.



At our meetings we start with a candle offering, a recitation of The Rules for Meditation and then two periods of sitting, which are split by a period of walking meditation. After this we do what all good Buddhist groups do and have a cup

Members of the Aberdeenshire group gathered round the Altar at The Haven of tea and a biscuit.

For me personally the cup of tea has become one of the most pleasing aspects of the group. I don't know if others feel the same way, but I look forward to it every week. As I said earlier during covid I missed the sense of community when we were in lock down. What a joy to sit with like minded people and enjoy a sense of true community. Our discussions are often centred around a Buddhist reading or teaching but sometimes we just chat about everyday things. My feeling is that there is a true sense of Sangha developing.

If any of our Scottish Sangha friends find themselves in the northeast on holiday or business do feel free to come along on a Thursday night to The Haven in Stonehaven at 7.30pm and join us.

Thane Lawrie



Just as it is

Here, this moment
and seemingly the next
just as it is.
Not compounding delusion
by wishing to be somewhere
else.

Just sitting here.
Concrete path.
Bowling green.

A father kicking a football
with his small son.
Sun in clear blue sky,
the boy points to a plane.

April warmth brings
midges and flies. . .
Behind me
a loud wren in a hedge.

Eric Nicholson



My Experience of Sangha

'You must know the ideal; you must accept the actual.

Only thus can you help others and yourself.'

— Rōshi P.T.N.H. Jiyu-Kennett, *The Wild, White Goose: The Diary of a Female Zen Priest*

I have just completed my 100th day meditating every morning. up but when they left it felt empty again.

The only space I can find in our busy household is underneath the stairs like a middle-aged meditating version of Harry Potter. It has taken me 27 years of trying to have a daily meditation practice. The fact I am immensely attached to and proud of that milestone is testament to how far I still have to go.

The ability to commit, and sit, in meditation every morning has little to do with me and everything to do with my recent experience of sangha over the past year.

In 2017 I founded a community wellbeing charity, The Haven in Stonehaven. During that time we have had several different meditation traditions hire the space which I was always delighted about. I have gone to them all, with varying degrees of engagement and attendance. I always find it hopeful to just be and learn from like-minded people. Yet these experiences were always transitory. Every meditation venue hire at The Haven filled me

Last year the Aberdeenshire Soto Zen began holding meditation every Thursday night from 7.30pm - 9pm at The Haven. Having witnessed numerous attempts for meditation at The Haven I observed a different quality in this one. A core handful of people that have been meditating together for over 30 years. What I had identified is the strength and power of sangha.

At The Haven one of our values is community, which we define as the power of inclusion and belonging. What the Aberdeenshire Soto Zen embodied through sangha was very aligned to what we value as an organisation.

With my work I spend a lot of time in the wellbeing 'industry'. I am still taken by surprise at how political, territorial and judgmental it can be. Truthfully, my experiences have made me shy away from wellbeing communities, outside of The Haven, and the concept of sangha.

What I appreciated with the Aberdeenshire Soto Zen members was their ordinariness. I mean that as the highest compliment. My time with sangha I saw how subtle, humble and gentle the members are. These were clearly experienced meditators yet they welcomed people new to meditation as equals. They looked just like everyone else, didn't try to teach anyone or claim to know anything at all really. How refreshing.

Thursday night with the Aberdeenshire Soto Zen Sangha is the highlight of my week. Knowing that there is a dedicated time where I can just sit and meditate with other people has been a huge comfort. In a demanding modern world I feel has become somewhat flaky and full of expectations, I know I can lean into this committed and strong sangha and find some respite.

Our conversations after meditation are never boring! Some of the discussions include how one meditates with a hangover and how football crowds could benefit from meditation.

There were some elements of Soto Zen practice that took me a while to acclimatise too. At first I found the reading of 'The Rules of Meditation' before every meditation challenging and verging on cultish. However, my experience of sangha was quite the op-

posite; no one was trying to convert me or asking me to pay vast sums of money to be there. Now I find the ritual of reading the rules illuminating. How can I read the same words every week and discover new aspects like it was my first time reading it?

It was similar to chanting the Ancestral Line. Originally I found it a bit cumbersome, embarrassing to pronounce the words wrong or out of time. Now I find it a beautiful way to honour all those who came before and played a part in me being able to sit and meditate. Part of the power of sangha has been giving me space to come out of my conditioning and change the preconceived qualities of my mind.

Looking beyond my first 100 days of daily meditation I am planning to celebrate my first year of meditation this New Years Eve at Throssel Hole. My intuitive sense to honour this time of year has always been to be quiet, reflective and present. Now I have found a sangha that shares that same intention too.

Starkeeper Morton



Images & Ideas —

A photograph
Of flowing water.
Can never completely
show
Flowingness.



An idea of being.
Can never completely
express
Beingness.

Flowingness
Beingness

We might say
The active principle
In authentic training?

Kathleen Campbell

Morning Labyrinth Meditation

My son teaches philosophy in Mahindra International United World College, outside Poona in India. There is a network of 18 of these UWC colleges worldwide which are founded on the belief that education is a force to unite people, nations and cultures for a peaceful and sustainable future.

The College was built 26 years ago on top of a hill about 20 miles outside Poona. The campus has been beautifully designed in a stunning setting on a hill in a lush 175-acre biodiversity park. There are about 300 resident 16–17-year-old students who come from all over the world for a 2-year programme of community living and experiential learning for the International Baccalaureate.

It's a wonderful place to visit and I have stayed on the campus many times since 2011. One of its many features is a large labyrinth about 200-foot square. I assume it was built in the early days of the College. The only visible information about it is this sign:



I did find this aerial photo of it, which, judging by the absence of trees must have been taken in the monsoon season shortly after it was created. I have nev-

er seen it look so lush and green as I have only visited in the dry season when the ground is hard and parched, and they have to water the trees.



One foot in front of the other

I have been using the labyrinth for morning meditations ever since I first visited the school. I try to arrive before 7.0am which is when the sun begins to rise.

At each corner there is an entrance to one of the four paths, and each is marked with a banana plant:



Each time I need to make a conscious decision which corner to start from. I make Gassho before entering and lowering my eyes as I step forward. Now I am on the path. I keep the centre of my focus on the few paving stones directly ahead of me.



*One foot in front of the other. Slow mindful steps. I am on the path. My mind wanders and I bring it back to the present and listen to the dawn chorus. Familiar tweets and chirps mingle with sounds that are only heard in the tropics. Strange repetitive beeping bird calls sounding like electronic devices blend with bizarre whooping calls made by the troupe of monkeys that live in the jungly woods nearby. Mind wanders. I feel a floating gossamer strand of spider's web brush across my face. One foot in front of the other. I am on the path. The ground is parched, nothing is growing. Hear and feel the scrunch of fallen dry leaves beneath each foot. The morning air feels fresh and cool as I breathe in and take the next step. One step in front of the other. I don't need to know where I'm going; the path snakes and twists and I follow. No need to try to understand the whole picture. There in front of me are the next few paving stones before me. One step in front of the other. In the centre there is a tree with a circular path around it which all the paths lead to and when I reach it there is the second conscious decision to be made; which path out should I take? I know that each path will lead me back to one of the corners. I choose one and step off the circular path. I am still on my path. One step in front of the other. The birds sing, beep and whoop. The cool morning air is slightly warmer as the sun rises. The occasional purring from a motor scooter on the road leading to the school. Mind wanders. One step in front of the other. A fly takes an interest in my face. The words from a song come into my mind **We may never pass this way again.** I am on the path. One step in front of the other eventually brings me to one of the corners.*

I make gassho. Another day.....

Julian Goodacre



Earth Day Meditation on Stonehaven Beach

April 22nd was a beautiful, blustery, sunny Saturday morning. The Aberdeenshire Soto Zen group and The Haven embraced the elements and joined in meditation with members of the Stonehaven community on the beach to raise personal and public awareness of Earth Day.

This was the 52nd Earth Day marked by people of all faiths and none across the globe. The Stonehaven event was planned to raise awareness of the climate emergency and highlight the inter-relationship of all life on the planet. Through meditation the group both ‘touched the Earth’ and drew the attention of passers-by and participants to Earth Day.

The programme for the event incorporated meditations and readings that invit-



ed participants to reflect on the idea that we are all made of recycled elements that have existed in many forms in the past and will continue to evolve into new forms in the future. Between 11am and midday we moved through different forms of meditation: from guided to walking, to silent and finally meditation to music. Friends from The Haven had constructed a flower arch and towards the end of the ceremony we invited participants to write their pledges to the Earth on strips of cloth to attach to the frame. Our event was enriched by contributions of poetry contributed by Thane Laurie and a Yoga session offered by a lady from the local community who had joined us.

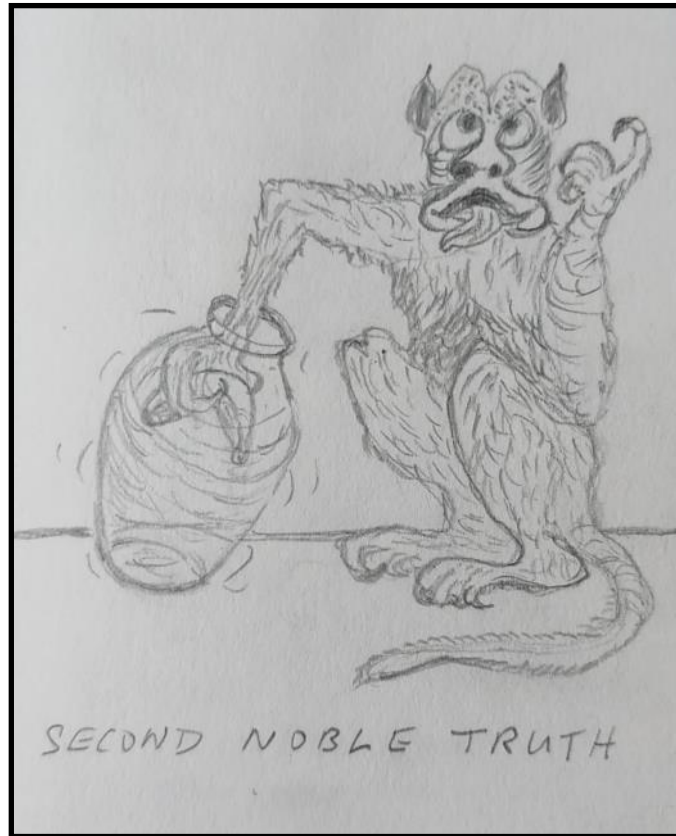
The event went well. We generated a lot of interest from passers by, who stopped and asked what we were doing and why and a lot of photographs were taken. People came along and joined for a while and went about their business, which was what we invited them to do as even 5 minutes meditating has a positive effect. We also raised the profile of the Zen group locally and most importantly had an enjoyable time together.

Fiona Beeley

Earth Anthem
By Abhay Kumar

Our cosmic oasis, cosmic blue pearl
the most beautiful planet in the universe
all the continents and all the oceans
united we stand as flora and fauna
united we stand as species of one earth

diverse cultures, beliefs and ways
we are humans, Earth is our home
all the people and all the nations
all for one, one for all
united we unfurl the blue marble flag.



With thanks to Eric Nicholson for this line drawing —

Jukai 2023

Jukai takes a bit of time.
I'm glad I had to wait the extra year,
Grateful for the Introductory and Introduction
To the Precepts weekends.

And Jukai is special.
Yes, there are the ceremonies but best
To arrive at them open. Meaningless
To consider yourself in any way informed (Formless maybe)

Yet the timing is so apposite
As the week progresses
And you have experienced all the feelings,
Discomforts and judgements,

And at first the sitting, and the sitting, feels
Like yet another discomfort
But it becomes the vessel
In which you learn to sit kindly

With your judgements.
And always there are the monks,
Straight and clear, embodying the Dharma,
With the moors, the curlews

And the hundred grasses.
And the rituals and the always getting it wrong
Until you learn to love
Your mistakes

Until you know that the abbot speaks true
When he says: “These are not symbolic.
We actually do this. It happens.’
And we do. And this does.

Alasdair Hosking

*Note: For those wishing to listen to the talks given at Jukai by Throssel Hole’s
new Abbot, Rev. Master Berwyn, please follow this link— [https://throssel.org.uk/
dharma-talks/jukai-talks-by-rev-master-berwyn-watson/](https://throssel.org.uk/dharma-talks/jukai-talks-by-rev-master-berwyn-watson/)*

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Signed _____

Date _____