

—*Portobello Buddhist Priory*—



A Temple of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives



Interdependency: tortoiseshell butterfly (with thanks to Graham Jordan)

Newsletter September-December 2024

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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 and—currently—on Friday evenings (once per month.)

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

— *Prior's Notes* —

Beginnings

Meditation can be described as: showing up in this moment; as being about the here and now, because in the end it becomes clear there isn't actually any other time or any other place; this is the one time or place that actually always exists for us. We could also call this the practice of being present, meaning to be aware of your sense experience as it's arising. When we're meditating, sense experience includes the movement of body sensations, the sense of hearing and the sense of sight. These sensing areas basically cover it, although of course there might be the smell of incense burning or something cooking next door.

So to be present when meditating includes awareness of seeing, hearing and feeling in the body. But why 'being present' doesn't just automatically happen, is that we very often seem to get 'taken away' by our thinking. It's very com-

mon that when thoughts arise they seem to entrap us or put us in something of a trance and we go off to other places and other times in our heads. So to become present is to become more aware of when we've 'gone away' and to practice being more deeply anchored in the body in the present moment, each time we 'return'.

We can also recognise here an 'interior mirror' version of these outer sensory areas: where, for instance, hearing gets tuned to the mental monologues, the chattering conversations in our heads. Sight, to the arising mental images associated with our memories and self-stories, while body sensations can be triggered by these internal movements, for instance, a negative memory or imagined scenario causing the body to contract in a fear response in real time.

Initially we may ask: why should I bother practicing with this? Well firstly, our life happens here and now and if we want to live, to be having our life, receiving our life, then it means consciously being awake and alert in this moment to its experiences. Another point would be that when we go off into trains of thought, very often it's not a happy time. This has been shown in neuroscience, where typically, we go into patterns of anxiety about the future and some remorse about the past.

Whereas to be present offers us the chance of being more fulfilled and happy, dealing with the actual life circumstances as they arise. Another dimension to this point is that meditation can be a natural nervous system regulator, because as we become increasingly aware of the different states of our bodies and minds we can get more adept at unhooking our self-identifications and calming ourselves down.

Fundamental to all of this is the growing recognition that a lot of what goes on in our mental world and becomes a source of suffering, is a strong tendency to generate and maintain a sense of being a fixed and separate self. So we can perhaps think of this description of practice as a sort of foundational take on the life journey of awakening, a version of the expression, 'beginners mind', where

it can always be fruitful to come back to these first insights, whether after weeks or years of meditating, to give us a fresh reminder of the bedrock practice of being present. And the fact that it's always 'new' means in a sense, we are always 'the beginner', learning to be open and ready to encounter life, rather than being on automatic, assuming we know what's coming next. Every moment is a fresh arising, and we are fully equipped with seeing, hearing and feeling in the body/mind, to come to know and appreciate our actual life's unfolding, not just as a fixed and separate sense of self, but as part of a profoundly interconnected reality.



Wedding ceremony

Lay minister Fedor Bunge recently officiated as the celebrant at his daughter's Wedding Service. A slightly abridged version of the Service follows:

Welcome to all the family and friends of Lizzie & Sam on this **great day**, to this lovely farm in these beautiful surroundings for this very happy occasion.

My name is Fedor, and I am a Lay Minister with Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey in Northumberland.

I am also Lizzie's Dad.

While I was greatly honoured when Lizzie & Sam asked if I might be the celebrant today, I was also pretty terrified, as I haven't done this before, so please bear with me if there are any hiccoughs, or my voice gets a bit quavery.

I am starting with a short introduction about the couple, although I realise that if you are here today it is because you are already important people in Lizzie and Sam's lives.

Lizzie & Sam have known each other for over 10 years. They met in Glasgow while they were at university, and became a couple over 7 years ago when they were both living in London.

We are really quite lucky that they have been able to make it here today as Lizzie has just taken up her first post as a consultant child psychiatrist in Eating Disorders, and Sam is



freshly back from Cannes and the world of film.

As a family we have got to know Sam over the years they have been together, and thoroughly approve of him. We're very happy to welcome him into our family—he's a fine fellow. He's thoughtful, loyal, giving, funny and warm.

And what's to say about Lizzie?

Twin daughter, and first to appear on the scene by 5 minutes. She's warm, bright, giving, welcoming, competitive and determined. She, like Sam, has a wide circle of good friends who she values highly. She works hard and seems to play hard too. She is human and fallible, and I love her to bits.

So, it is the joining together of two lovely people.

As a lay minister with Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey, I have been given authority by the Central Registration Office Scotland to carry out this ceremony—which is fairly amazing!

I first came to Buddhism in the mid-70s at a time in my life when I was a bit lost and looking for something. I was at a music festival in mid-Wales, and I noticed someone reading a book called "Selling water by the river". The title intrigued me and I discovered that it was written by the founder of Throssel Hole Abbey.

And so I went there to learn more about meditation and Buddhism.

My first experience of the monastery was very positive. I loved the peace and calmness—it felt like coming home. I was also very inspired by the whole air of acceptance and tranquillity. So thus began my long association with Buddhism.

The abbey largely follows the teaching of Dōgen, a 13th-century Japanese monk of the Sōtō Zen tradition. This school emphasises the importance of formal meditation, from which the practice of mindfulness is derived. This is a practice that Shakyamuni Buddha used to realise his own Enlightenment.

So, we will now have a few minutes of quiet contemplation. This won't be a marathon, but just a short spell of sitting quietly, being aware of our surroundings, of each other, and time to just be.

I will sound this bowl three times to start, and twice to finish.

(2 minutes of meditation)

And now Lizzie's twin sister Julia will read E. E. Cummings' "Love is More Thicker than Forget".

(Reading)

One of the central Buddhist tenets is compassion, both for oneself and for all beings. This seems very relevant today as Lizzie & Sam are about to make this deep commitment to each other. Compassion, tenderness, gentleness, kindness and warmth—if you can hold onto these values through your time together, then you will be okay.

Your vows of commitment to each other that you will take today are so important.

When you are feeling perhaps less than charitable, life's ups and downs come to us all—to be able to see the Buddha, the awakened one, in each other, the Buddha Nature that each of us has, to help each other to achieve the very best that you can be, respecting each other's space, remembering and recognising what each other's needs are, and perhaps being able to put aside one's own wants. To cut through the trivia that we are all subjected to, and concentrate on what matters, to be in the present, forget yesterday, don't worry about tomorrow, it hasn't happened yet. Now is everything, we need to try to do it right. Right thought, right speech, right action.

In marriage, two individuals working together, making much more together than they could if they were on their own, looking out for one another, helping the other to achieve their full potential, not concentrating on their own wants, but being the wind beneath the wings of the other, helping and allowing them to fly.

This ties in nicely with the Bodhisattva ideal, someone who vows to help all others to attain enlightenment before achieving enlightenment themselves.

Paradoxically, by doing this, looking out for others before oneself, and concentrating on that as your primary task in life, will bring the realisation of your own innate Enlightenment and contentment.

(Pause)

Now for our second reading. Sam's friend Ben will read an extract from a letter

by Johnny Cash to June Carter.

(Reading)

Thank you, Ben.

(Pause)

Lizzie and Sam, Sam and Lizzie, are you ready to marry each other?

Lizzie & Sam: We are.

Then let's start.

Elizabeth T B, do you promise to honour Sam as your equal, to meet him with kindness and compassion and to be attentive and considerate to him?

Lizzie: I do.

Do you promise to nurture harmony within your relationship through each word and action, taking good care of one another?

Lizzie: I do.

Do you promise to give the gifts of forgiveness, patience and love generously, always remaining faithful to the unique promises of marriage?

Lizzie: I do.

(Pause)



Samuel J H, do you promise to honour Lizzie as your equal, to meet her with kindness and compassion and to be attentive and considerate to her?

Sam: I do.

Do you promise to nurture harmony within your relationship through each word and action, taking good care of one another?

Sam: I do.

Do you promise to give the gifts of forgiveness, patience and love generously, always remaining faithful to the unique promises of marriage?

Sam: I do.

Now, do you Elizabeth T B take Samuel J H to be your lawful wedded husband?

Lizzie: I do.

And do you Samuel J H take Elizabeth T B to be your lawful wedded wife?

Sam: I do.

Lizzie and Sam, please can you now exchange the rings that you have chosen for each other?

Douglas & Joe, can you please approach?

These rings will remind you of the promises that you have made to each other today, and of the love and support that encircles you.

As you leave here today, keep the warmth and joy that you feel now in your hearts, it will be reflected back to you in each step of your journey together.

And now with the authority vested in me, and with the help of all those here today, I pronounce you to be married. You are wife and husband, husband and wife. You may kiss!

(Signing of the Register)

As we sign the Register we will have a rendition of Paul McCartney's "Every

Night" by Thomas D H.

Vespers

“It is done so that the Wheel of the Law turns and continues to turn during sleep, so that a person makes the right decisions in the event of death during that time, but also so that meditation continues through the night”

- Rev. Master Kōten Benson

Vespers means ‘evening’, and so our recitation of these litanies and invocations really seem like a preparation for sleep and a nod to the process of continuation. The Wheel of the Law does not stop while we are asleep, the world does not get put on pause while one is sleeping, and so meditation does not stop either. I find this act enlightening, but what do the words mean, and what symbolism is there in our Vespers? I am not necessarily an expert in Zen (or Soto Zen) Buddhism, but I’ve studied Japanese Buddhism as a whole, so I’m going to dive into the buddhas, bodhisattvas and wisdom kings that are brought up in the Vespers and some of the symbolism in what we are reciting - at least my perspective of it.

‘The Litany of the Great Compassionate One’ is to Avalokitêśvara, aka Kanzeon (also called Kannon Bosatsu and Kanjizai). In Japanese ‘bosatsu’ means bodhisattva, one who chooses to postpone their own enlightenment to help others reach awakening. Kanzeon symbolises compassion for all beings, their name translating to ‘Lord Who Regards All’; they show compassion to everyone. Something interesting to me, perhaps as I have studied Buddhism, is that in zazen Kanzeon is ‘one with a thousand arms and hands with an eye in each’, and so, this is ‘Senju Kannon’. See, there are six forms of Kanzeon, one for each of the six realms, and Senju Kannon saves those that are in the realm of Hungry Ghosts (gaki). That isn’t to say the other forms of Kanzeon are less important, but just to note that in soto zen the image of Kanzeon is the thousand-armed Senju Kannon.

A folk story about Senju Kannon states that Kanzeon vowed to work without relenting until all beings could be free of the cycle of suffering, but

with the sheer number of people needing help, Kanzeon's head splits into pieces. Seeing this, Amida Buddha gave Kanzeon eleven heads to witness the world's suffering. Then Kanzeon reached out to all those in need and their two arms split. Amida Buddha this time gave Kanzeon one thousand arms, each with an eye so that they may see and reach out to all sentient beings and alleviate the suffering of the world.

As Kanzeon has such unwavering mercy towards all beings, I think the 'Litany of the Great Compassionate One' has a lot of meaning. Some of my favourite lines are: "The one who leaps beyond all fear," because isn't that what being compassionate is? Leaping beyond fear and reaching out to others. "His life is the completion of meaning"; compassion bringing meaning to existence. "Do, do the work within my heart" implying perhaps that within one's heart is compassion. I think this litany can be viewed from the perspective of compassion and reaching out to others.

But, I can note another being that comes up in the Litany of the Great Compassionate One. "To Indra the Creator I cry." Now, I find this interesting because within the next few lines it states: "Speak, speak, give me direction", which, to me, is speaking to Indra. Indra is a guardian deity (originally Hindu), in Japanese called 'Taishakuten', and they are the ruler of the cardinal directions, that is North, South, East, and West.

In Japan, these cardinal directions are each protected by a heavenly king, the Shitenno. They protect different aspects of the world, eliminate evil influences, and protect those who follow the dharma. Jikokuten protects the East, linking to spring and water as he guards the nation. Zochoten the South, linking to summer and fire as he protects spiritual growth. Komokuten the West, linking to autumn and metal as he discerns and punishes bad intentions, and Tamonten the North, linking to winter and earth, all knowing and always listening. I don't want to get overly complicated as I am not sure if they are important to zen or soto zen, but you may see them in mandala paintings and in the Lotus Sutra.

I think the important part here is that 'Indra' (Taishakuten) rules over

all directions and these beings that protect those directions, and so when we say: “speak, speak, give me direction” my mind goes to Indra, we are calling, perhaps symbolically, on this being who rules all directions and can point us the way we should be heading, perhaps towards Kanzeon and compassion, whichever way that might be. We follow this up by saying “Awakened awakened, I have awakened”, and so we have compassion, we are protected, the Buddha Mind exists in all of us, we are awakened and we ask for guidance from our reverend masters, from bodhisattvas, heavenly kings, and buddhas. Give us direction for our practice. That’s my thought.

It is at this point where I think to myself ‘darn, I write far too much’, but I want to mention the other beings that appear in the Vespers, that is, Achalanatha, Mahakala, and the ‘Cosmic Buddha’ (Mahavairocana). To be honest, I was quite excited when I saw ‘Invocation of Achala-na-tha’ for the



first time. As Acala Nātha (Sanskrit) is Fudō Myōō, the Great Immovable One. Very popular in Japan, a friend of mine actually bought a large wooden sculpture of Fudō Myōō and we giggled as they strapped him into their suitcase to bring them through airport customs and take him across the world.

Fudō Myōō is actually a ‘wisdom king’, which symbolises the ways that obstacles get in the way of our teachings or thoughts. Fudō Myōō stands in greed, ignorance, and aversion (which is why he is literally engulfed in flames). Three things that I’m sure we’ve all come up against, and so symbolically Fudō

Myōō is the wrathful manifestation of Dainichi Nyorai (who I will mention more later), and he is wrathful because he faces up to these challenges, these obstacles, and is immovable in his faith. You will know that it is an image of Fudō Myōō because he has fangs, one pointing up and the other down; he has a ring of flames around him, and he carries a sword in one hand and a rope in another. The sword is called kurikara and it literally ‘cuts through ignorance’, while the rope is said to tie up demons that need to be taught the precepts. Fudō Myōō stands in the flames of suffering, yet he accepts the present situation, not running away from that which is unpleasant. He faces it head on and overcomes.

So, the Invocation of Achala-na-tha says: “Let us so be engulfed within its praises evermore that, by our own wills and vigilance, may we our fetters cut away” i.e. let Fudō Myōō keep us on the path of Buddhism, let us by our own will face up to these obstacles and overcome them, so that we can cut away our own ignorance, greed, and aversion. “May we within the temple of our own hearts dwell – amidst the myriad mountains” i.e. we should trust in our meditation in every situation. I think this is my favourite invocation, but maybe I just really like Fudō Myōō.

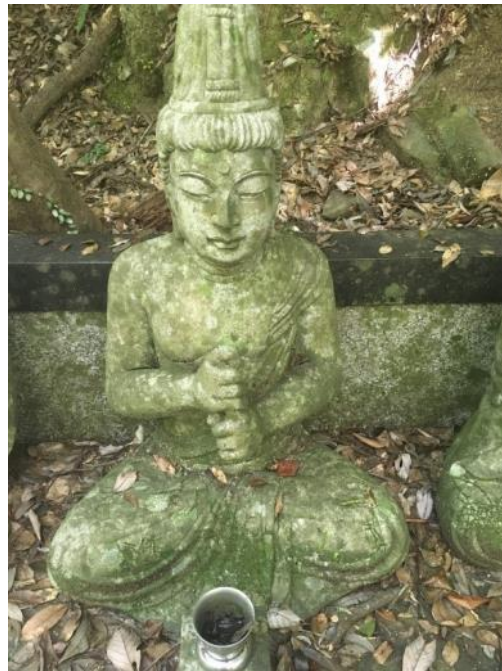
Then we have the ‘Invocation of Maha-ka-la’, which is much shorter. Mahakala is called Daikokuten in Japanese, and this means ‘the great black one’. This relates to ‘great darkness’, as in ignorance, so he can transform the world of darkness into light. If you look at historical artwork, Mahakala is quite scary, but nowadays in Japan they actually look like a happy man holding a mallet of wish granting (Uchide no Kozuchi) and a sack of emptiness. The sack of emptiness has been described as a symbol of the eighth consciousness (Alaya-Vijnana), the store-



house of karma, but it is also a never-ending bag, providing food and wealth to those who give and ask for nothing in return.

Daikokuten symbolises the principle that transcends all oppositions, linked to the ‘three poisons’ (ignorance, anger, and greed), but able to transmute them into awakening (with the help of his lucky mallet and bag of emptiness). The most important part of this invocation is “the arrow of emptiness”. The arrow can pierce the darkness of delusion and transmute it into enlightenment; we can give without wanting.

Finally, the Cosmic Buddha (Mahavairocana) is Dainichi Nyorai. (So, Fudō Myōō is the ‘wrathful manifestation’ of this Buddha and their teachings.) Dainichi Nyorai is a fully awakened being; they are the Cosmic Buddha whose body is the entire universe. In Japan, Dainichi is considered the most important of all Buddhas, they are the central Buddha, the zenith. I believe that they symbolise ‘enlightenment’ as a concept and how all things come together into one existence (this is why Fudō Myōō symbolises the obstacles that face awakening and enlightenment and helps to remove them. I hope that makes some sense). The Invocation is quite short, but I think it is perhaps just a nod to enlightenment and Dainichi Nyorai’s importance.



To conclude, let’s talk about ‘the Golden Bell that Rings But Once’ and bring it back to the quote from Rev. Master Koten Benson that I began with. My thought is that these Vespers are a meditation, letting our practice continue

into the night, and also on for eternity. We call on different beings for guidance and as a reminder that it is by our own will that we stay on this path, though it may be difficult sometimes. Thus, the golden bell is the eternal sound of meditation. The first ring is when you are awakened and begin your practice into Buddhism, but the sound continues through the whole path to enlightenment (‘the golden bell that rings but once’). Peace upon the pillow, peace as we fall asleep and recognise that the world does not stop, it will continue and so will the path to enlightenment. Makura Om...

Elisha Ager



Dependency

There is a verse said before an informal meal. It is part of a longer set of verses called “The Five Thoughts” recited before a formal meal during a retreat.

It goes:

We must think deeply of the ways and means by which this food has come.

We must consider our merit when accepting it.

We must protect ourselves from error by excluding greed from our minds.

We will eat lest we become lean and die.

We accept this food that we may become enlightened.

I have considered these verses for some time, particularly the first line.

In front of me most mornings is a plate of porridge. I like to have some honey on it and a little oat milk. So, I ask myself, how did this come to be? Well, simple. I fetched the oats from the cupboard, put them in a pan with

water and heated the mix for a while. Porridge! Well, yes, but where did the oats come from? The supermarket of course. And how did it get there? It came on a lorry with a driver. And someone unloaded it: someone stacked it on the shelves. OK so far. Now the oats were sown, grew and were harvested thanks to a farmer and his machinery, and the soil and the rain and the sun. Then they were packed in some factory using machinery controlled by some person, built by another person, designed by some engineer. And the packaging came from yet another place...

And that is just the oats!

The process that looks so simple is in fact very complex involving hundreds of people who built the trucks; who got the oil out of the ground and refined it and so on. If any link in this chain is broken, there is no porridge. I don't know any of these people involved in this, yet I am dependent on all of them. And they on me for buying a product that gives them a living. People depend on my paying taxes so

that they can go to a doctor, send their children to school et al. And thus I arrive at the concept of interdependence. Hardly an original thought.

Overall, the concept of interdependence emphasizes the idea that nothing exists in isolation and that all things are contingent upon other factors for their existence. I have heard it said that what goes around comes around. It may be so, but I suspect not literally. If I let some driver out of a side road to join the main carriageway, it may be a good deed. It certainly feels the right thing to do. Good because it makes their life a little easier, less frustrating. Good because it helps me to build a habit of consideration, of kindness. It may be that somewhere down the road the act will be recalled and that driver may then do likewise and spread the kindness around. Who knows, someone may let me out into the main road in the future! Or maybe just give me a smile when I am a bit down, or pick up my shopping when I drop it.

The above idea has led me to a Buddhist teaching called dependant origination. It goes thus, each one depend-

ing on the one before it:

- Ignorance
- Mental formations
- Consciousness
- Name and form
- The senses: sight, hearing, smell, touch, taste, and mind
- Contact
- Feeling
- Craving
- Clinging
- Becoming
- Birth
- Ageing and death

I have read that there is actually no ending for the list is circular. And like the dependent links of porridge, the chain may be broken at any point.

So how do I break that chain? I had to think about that a bit.

In meditation what arises just arises. No need to follow a story about what happened or might have happened. The nose itches. The traffic passes. Being mindful of when I get pulled away from contemplation into involvement. Being mindful in my speech, in

my actions. Gently returning to what is in a compassionate way, without condemnation. Being wise in what I do or don't do.

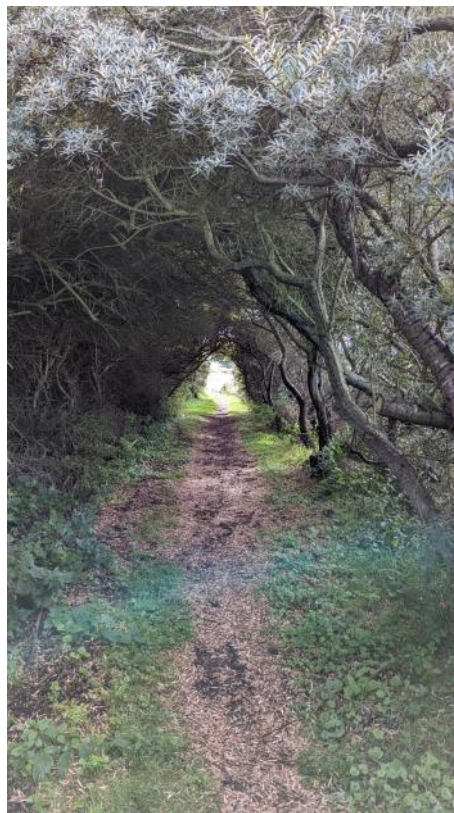
Letting go is very hard and I get mugged all the time by stories, by the identity, the self, that I created. The person that fixes things. The person that writes articles. The person that all too often doesn't get it right. This is

the ground of training.

Why have I come here? For the benefit of all beings. We are connected. I cannot train for myself alone.

To those who have entered on this path I offer merit. And also to those who have not.

Graham Jordan



*Coastal path near Longniddry
(photo: Willie Grieve)*

Mud Sticking To The Wall —

This Thinking Mind of mine often gets overwhelmed by Dharma.

When listening to a talk I want to stop and contemplate each new idea.

However much I try, so much of the Water of the Dharma seems to slip through my cupped fingers as I attempt to *hold on to it*. But does it entirely slip through my fingers? Maybe I should stop ‘trying’? I was struck by Kathleen’s analogy of throwing mud against a wall and eventually, over the years, finding that some of it may have stuck.

I find reading easier than listening as I can stop wherever I want to and take time to contemplate. But even when reading I notice that I am often skipping through the sentences that I don’t want to grapple with in a race towards the end. *Concentrate, Julian!* Perhaps I should try to stop trying to *grapple?! Be gentle, Julian!*

This fertile monkey mind of mine has the tendency to carry on swinging from one branch to another branch in my mind, without taking time to *STOP!* and take time to examine the individual branch that I am currently hanging onto. Is it a fact? Is it an assumption? Is it an opinion? What does it tell me about me? On my three weeks visit to India this year I decided to take only two pieces of Dharma and planned to study them well. One was a photocopy of a five-page article by Rev Valeria Allison from Shasta Abbey published in the 2015 OBC Annual Journal, entitled *Notes on Some of the Ways Scripture Appears in Daily Life*.

In this article she contemplates various aspects of *Rules for Meditation*. I had already read this before I left, but I wanted time to savour it some more. I also brought a copy of *Rules for Meditation*, which I have so often recited, but never taken the time to stop and study. It has been rewarding reading sections from them both on a daily basis. Different sentences spring out at me on different days.

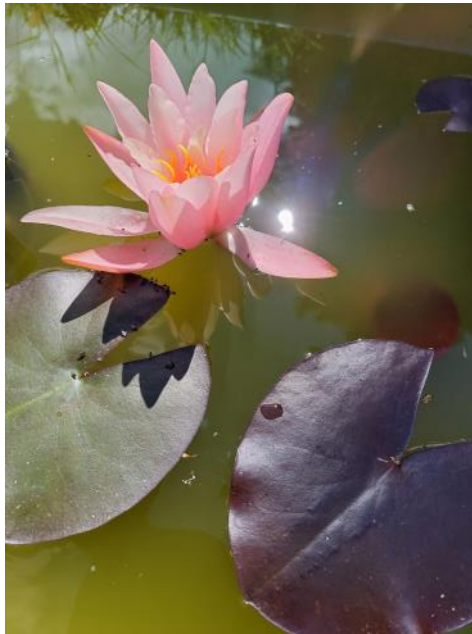
Early into my stay a sentence from Rev Valeria's article jumped out at me from the page.

A flashlight of logic can be helpful and then again it is completely outshone by the light of the Dharma that unfolds from within.

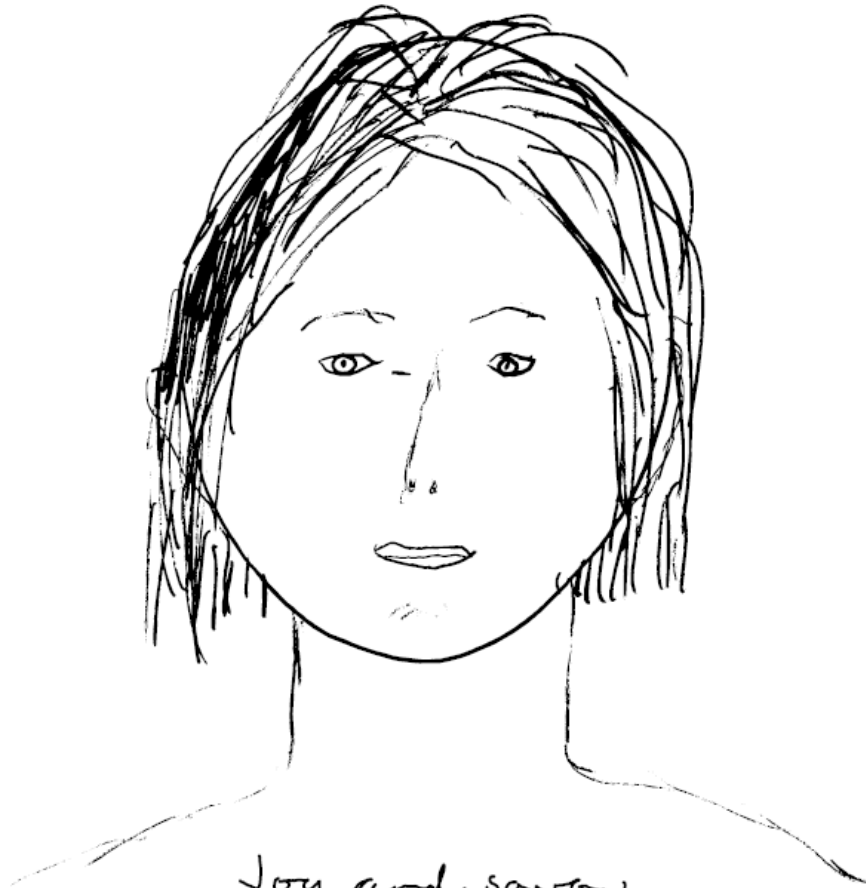
Later in my stay this sentence from *Rules for Meditation* seemed to have a special resonance for me.

Since Truth is seen to be clearly apart from that which is unclean, why cling to a means of cleansing it?

Julian Goodacre



(With thanks to Fedor Bunge)



Joy and sorrow
blow through the pure heart
without impediment.

(With thanks to Neil Rothwell)

Buddha in the Garden

The storm has passed.
It kept me awake
During the night,
Lying in the dark
Thinking of blackbirds,
While the rain lashed
And the wind roared.
It felt like a living force,
Able to do as it pleased.

In the garden, indomitable,
Sits our weathered Buddha.
Motionless, inscrutable.
His lowered gaze
has seen this all before.
Time will pass, storms
Will come and go.
While we petition
For the blackbird's return.

David Campbell



Playing —

Aged 75, our grandparenting duties have started again with the very welcome return of our son and his family from New Zealand. It's 15 years since we had grandchildren aged 4 years, and it's been a salutary reminder of the difference in energy between 60 and 75! As I creaked my increasingly inflexible body on to the carpet recently to join my little granddaughter who had begun to play with a wooden railway, and random plastic fencing and animals, I began to help her to corral the animals into pens, to protect them from the fierce-looking wolf.

But she insisted that the wolf, too, needed shelter, so we began to assemble a kind of shed for him. At last, everything seemed set up, and I was internally congratulating myself on how amicably we were playing together, when she looked at me and said; "Can we play now, grandpa?"

What? I thought, startled – but we are playing! What can she mean?

On instinct I selected one of the cows, and in a cow-voice (don't ask) I suggested to the dog that he might like to travel on the railway to visit the sheep. My granddaughter enthusiastically busied herself becoming the sheep, discussing among themselves how they could open the fence to welcome the dog in, but without letting the wolf, who was lurking hungrily in his makeshift shelter, dart out and gobble them up. The ducks & geese quacked their contribution to the emerging strategy, including how to cross the railway line without being squashed by the train.

In the hubbub of animal voices which we were managing to generate between us, I glanced across at my granddaughter and could see that she was immersed in this make-believe world – this was the playing she had meant.

She was due to have her first day at primary school the following week, and I had asked her before our play session whether she was looking forward to going to school. She was silent, and I thought it best not to persevere with that topic. But after some time of ferrying various animals along the railway to visit others in an intense social whirl (while dodging the attentions of the ever-

attentive wolf) I caused mummy-cow in a strangely Joyce Grenfell-like accent to ask her how she was feeling about going to school.

She paused, and then in a small voice replied; “I’m shy”, eyes downcast.

My heart melted, in an instant transported back to my own first days at primary school: the shock of it all, the noise, the smell in the school canteen, the kind teacher comforting me as the tears ran down my cheeks, desperately missing my mum. No pre-school playgroups in those days to lessen the shock.

What struck me was how my little granddaughter was able to confide her true feelings when protected within the world of play, of make-believe. Learning as a child how to cope with the immense challenges of the real world needs to be mediated and explored and experimented with through some sort of protective insulation, it seems to me, rather like these remote arms that scientists use when handling radioactive material. And play is a very powerful, indeed indispensable, form of this distancing layer of protection.

I found myself wondering whether we’re very much different as adults. Could our form of make-believe be the stories we tell ourselves, the way we make sense of the world? - - *‘Everything happens for a reason - - I’ve never really been good enough - - hard work leads to success - - I’m just not loveable - - I’m the master of my own destiny - - I always fail - - good things happen to good people - - the world is against me - - I can learn and grow - - I am loved.’*

Some of the stories are helpful, even life-giving, it seems to me; some less so or not at all, particularly those that lead to despair or hatred.

On reflection, though, what stands out for me is the importance of becoming aware of what our own ‘stories’ are; of what might impede us from seeing clearly, rather than through a set of confining or distorting filters.

Reading RM Favian’s notes in this Newsletter, it struck me, with a renewed sense of wonder, of the courage in our willingness to sit facing a wall, slowly becoming aware, as RM Favian puts it, of what goes on in our mental world and becomes a source of suffering, for self and others, including those stories.

In the cycle of life, I find as I get older that I become more aware of the narra-

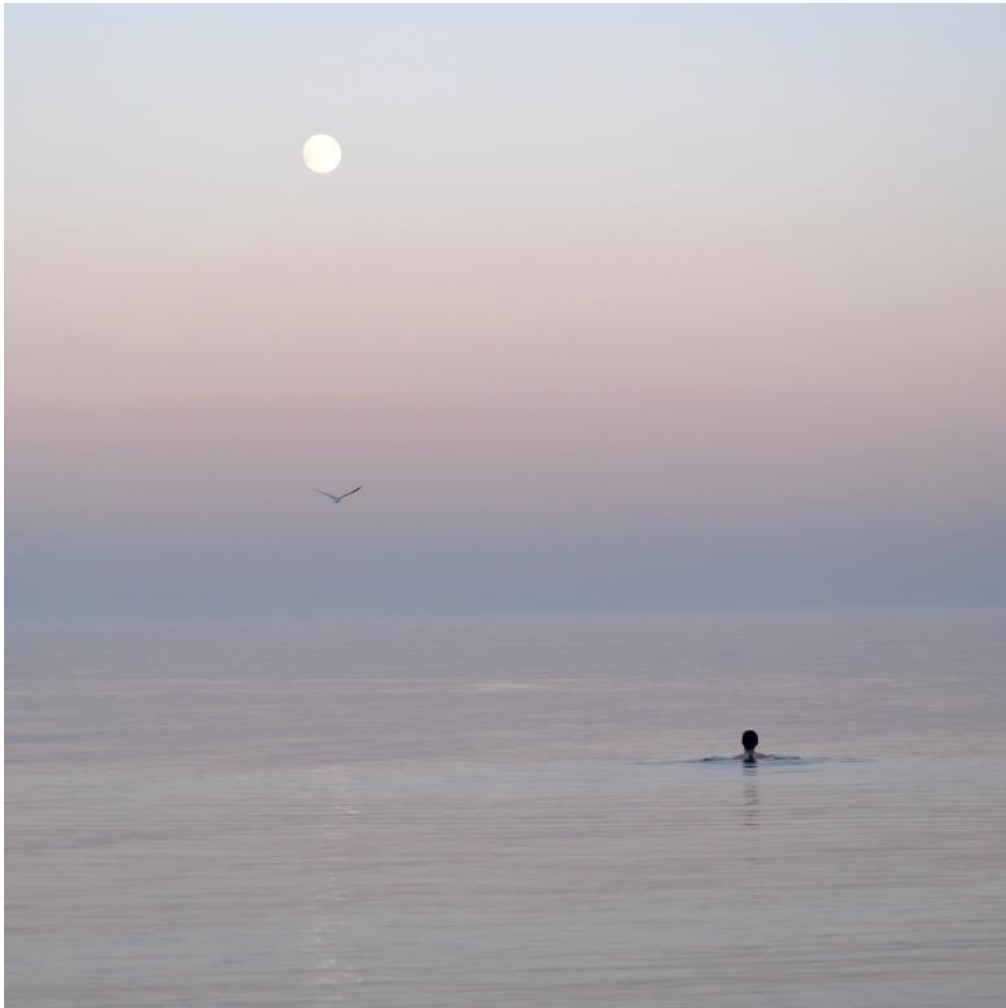
tives that have undergirded my life, or at least of some of them, helpfully or otherwise. Perhaps the increasing sense of mortality leads to sharpened awareness, but I also have a deep sense of gratitude for our practice and training and the increasing clarity it brings over time.

And bows too to my little granddaughter, for the enjoyment of lying on the floor at 75, quacking, howling and mooing -

Willie Grieve



A granddaughter's first day at school —



*Photograph from the ongoing series, The Promenader
(Portobello) 2021 by David Williams*

Gift Aid Declaration

To: **Portobello Buddhist Priory**

Your Name _____

Full Home address _____

Postcode _____ Date _____

Please reclaim tax on my donations as follows (delete as appropriate):

I want to Gift Aid any donations I make in the future or have made in the past 4 years.

I want to Gift Aid my donation of [amount] given on [date]

You must pay at least as much income tax or capital gains tax as the amount of tax that we would reclaim on your donations and remember to notify us if this changes.

If this declaration applies to future changes, you are entitled to notify us of the cancellation of your declaration at any time.

Signed _____

Date _____