

—Portobello Buddhist Priory—



A Temple of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives



Guanyin (Avalokitesvara) statue, Royal Museum of Scotland

Calendar of Events September to December 2009

Portobello Buddhist Priory
27 Brighton Place, Portobello
Edinburgh, EH15 1LL
Telephone (0131) 669 9622
email: favian.straughan@homecall.co.uk
website: www.portobellobuddhist.org.uk

— 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 2009

Sunday 13th	Festival of Great Master Dogen	11am
-------------	--------------------------------	------

October

Sunday 18th	Renewal of Precepts	11am
-------------	---------------------	------

November

Sunday 1st	Festival of our Founder	11am
------------	-------------------------	------

Sunday 29th	Festival of the Buddha's Enlightenment	11am
-------------	--	------

December

Sunday 31st	New Year Festival	7.30- 10.30pm
-------------	-------------------	------------------

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.33

August 2009

— Prior's Notes —

The following pointers were developed and gathered from various sources for an introductory course in our practice – having also used them at a sangha dharma event and having received a request to make them more widely available, I offer them here for distribution through our newsletter.

Check posture: adjust spine, hand position, eyes open, senses open to the environment, some conscious breathing to settle body/mind into sitting.

Best to come with no expectations or agenda – our focus is awareness of 'this'.

- We need to offer energy, determination and discipline to the sitting.
- The mind wanders, accept this, but recognise when you are present again and bring awareness to the body\mind posture. Be willing to do this again and again.
- The mind is busy and scattered for most people, most of the time. Its job is to conceptualise reality. This is valuable but for zazen lacks the direct contact with things as they are.
- In zazen we stop following these patterns and return to the clarity of here and now.

Inside this issue-

Founding of the Priory 2

Emoticons of the Mind 3

Keith Mothersson 7

The Tentative Buddhist 8

(A Prospect) of Throssel Hole 11

Zenword - 12

- By 'asking' 'what is this' from the heart of our presence we can cut through the hypnotic circularity of our thinking.
- We need to learn the crucial difference between seeing/accepting conditions as they are, and indulging/repressing them.
- River image: a distracted mind is like a shallow river with rocks and weeds on the bed. The water ripples against them. Mental obstructions don't allow the experience of this moment to flow through.
- A zazen mind is like a deep river, it flows smooth and calm, the obstacles are not grasped after, the activity of now flows through.

- We learn to observe the distracted mind without judgement. The way it leans towards/away - fear and desire. And we know the suffering this creates when we suppress or indulge it.
- We learn the value of returning to the sanity of this moment with patience and confidence.
- We see the insubstantial nature of the thoughts and feelings that obsess us and we learn to hold them lightly.
- We begin to take care of the mind by observing its dynamic without interference.
- We begin to see what we usually missed, the vibrant reality in which we all live right now and are able to see and respond to the need of this moment.
- We see the un-graspable nature of things and also deepen our faith in direct experience: the immediacy of 'this' as the truth of our lives.
- Zazen expresses our confidence in our ability to SEE for ourselves the root of human suffering, and our trust in our capacity to bring it to an end.
- Finally, zazen is not something to ponder, but to do. To take up this practice is to actualize freedom right here in this moment, which is always our permanent address.

Founding of the Priory –

Thursday 25th October marks the 25th Anniversary of the founding of the Edinburgh Serene Reflection Meditation group at the Salisbury Centre in 1984.

Ten years later, on 11th September 1994, a ‘congregation day’ was held at the Salisbury Centre at which Rev Master Daishin gave his consent to the raising of funds to establish a Scottish Priory.

Randon Goodier, Lay Minister

Emoticons¹ of the Mind

A schoolboy shooting up his hand again and again shouting sir!, sir!, trying to get the teachers attention; a competent looking guy is modestly receiving pats on the back for a job well done; a little baby is filled with longing for its mother's breast; these are some of the recent images that have flashed through awareness during sitting when I have tried to step back from involvement with distracting thoughts.

I have always had a rather literal, visual kind of mind, and have often experienced these types of cartoon-like images during zazen. They show in quite a graphic way the feelings that are underneath the thoughts. I think of them as a kind of emoticon that my mind throws up to show me the feelings. Writing about them in this way is tricky, as it gives them a seeming substantiality that they do not have. They are just ephemeral mental objects that arise and pass like any other mental object. In one sense they are aspects of delusion, since they are showing the nature of some of my cherished delusions. However, providing I do not hold on them, they do contain helpful teaching, and in this article I will try to share that.

Much of the thinking that arises in my sitting appears to be very mundane

and seems to be of little consequence, yet the thoughts are often surprisingly hard to let go of. The content is nothing special, just the usual round of re-playing small incidents that have taken place in the recent past, thinking about what I might do in the immediate future, fantasising about getting things that I like, or working out how to avoid things I don't like, etc. So what is going on here?

Rev Master Daishin in talks he gave during the 2007 Segaki retreat explained how much of the thought that we can get caught up in during zazen could be described as complaint or justification². His teaching was that getting caught up in complaint and justification (as another way of looking at fear and desire) is what keeps us bound to what he called little picture mind i.e. the world of the self. When we find ourselves caught up in this way, we should allow our awareness to expand to encompass all that is going on, whilst neither being actively interested in the thoughts nor cutting them off. Rev Master particularly advised that we look directly at who (or what) it is that is that is having these thoughts.

It took me a while to recognise when my thoughts were playing the complaint and justification game, but now I see that it is indeed true that I spend a heck of a lot of time doing this. For

many years in zazen practice, when I found myself distracted over and over again by seemingly mundane thoughts, I would snap back to sitting in quite an irritated, aggressive way. One way I would do this was by completely shutting off the thought process and bringing my awareness totally back to the physical sensations of sitting and the sensory input from the environment. Putting Rev Master's teaching into practice showed that this approach involved a kind of slamming the door shut on these kind of thoughts and preventing them from revealing what it was that was they had to teach.

For me it seems to work like this: I recognise that my awareness has been hi-jacked into being fully engaged with some thought process and instead of just slamming back to focussing on the sitting I make a more gentle effort to allow awareness to encompass everything that is going on, both in my mind and in the environment. There is also a sort of inner questioning that is not verbal process, but more a kind of gentle effort to try to see more fully; to try to be as open as I can. Very often when this happens, my mind throws up fleeting images like those that I mentioned at the start. It is important that I don't get interested in these 'inner emoticons', and simply allow them to arise and pass away along with everything else, but they do have the value of graphically showing the feeling that is underneath the thoughts.

For me, a lot of the thought that arises during zazen seems to involve rearranging incidents from the past so that the situation turned out differently (i.e. complaining), or planning how I would handle a similar situation in the future (justification). The underlying purpose of this activity seems to be to try to rearrange how things were in the past, or how they might be in the future, so that my actions appear to me to be more in line with how I would like to be seen. Just writing this down is enough to reveal that this is a futile activity. I cannot change the past, nor can I manipulate future situations so that I always appear in a good light. Who am I trying to impress here? It turns out that I am actually trying to get my reactions to conform to some idea that I have of how I ought to be.

Unfortunately, the type of intellectual insight described above does not appease the mind's addiction to thinking these thoughts. Equally, in zazen, by aggressively shutting them off, I was in effect slapping them down and saying 'bad boy, you are supposed to be meditating!' As we all know, repressing something is a sure way to make it stronger. When I allow my awareness to expand to incorporate more of what is actually happening, a more compassionate approach emerges naturally. For example, the eager schoolboy flashes through awareness seeking attention, and showing that my thoughts were fantasies about how I could get

approval from others. But the school-boy is also full of life, positive energy and enthusiasm, and most definitely should not be slapped down as bad. He just needs to be acknowledged and have his energy redirected slightly so that he can make a positive contribution. In a sense I need to trust that I can let go of the need to seek approval and just be open as I can to whatever particular response is called for as situations arise. The bright energy and willingness shown by the schoolboy will take care of what is required, if it is allowed to.

Another example of ‘mundane’ thinking in zazen is planning what I will do in the immediate future, or how I might approach someone, or progress an ongoing scheme, or do something to improve a situation. Now there is a place for planning ahead, and it is good to have creative ideas for how a situation might be helped, but zazen is not the time for this kind of directed thought. The ‘emoicons that flash through in response to these kind of thoughts tend to be like the one about the adult who is getting recognition for something he has done. This shows that at least some element of the motivation is about gaining recognition and approval from others, and that the thinking is actually a kind of justification. Again, this adult is competent and energetic and is often (though not always!) trying to do good things, so should not be punished. He just needs

to recognise that action should be based in the bigger picture of a situation, and that there is space for others to contribute as well.

Sometimes the remembering or planning ahead fairly obviously involves sensual desire of some sort, and the thinking then involves fantasising about getting the desired object. On occasions I have found that it is good to make a firm act of will and simply shut off the fantasy (this is where there is a fairly familiar groove involved). However I was recently surprised to find that when I adopted the more open approach described above with more subtle forms of desire, the tiny baby described above flashed through awareness. At that moment the baby knew nothing but longing and would have done absolutely anything he could to get what he wanted. As an adult I have known this kind of ruthless focus on getting what I want. But the baby is just expressing his need for love and nourishment; how could he be bad? He is just completely consumed by longing and after he has been comforted and had his feelings acknowledged, can be gently shown that the real nourishment comes from the letting go.

All of the above examples involve the action of grasping, or its opposite, pushing away, and we Buddhists have lots of words to express this. ‘Greed’ and ‘hatred’ are examples of strong words that we sometimes use; ‘desire’

and 'loathing' have equally strong connotations. Training is a serious business and requires that we be completely honest with regard to our intentions, but I have come to prefer 'longing' and 'aversion', as less harsh words that seem to better describe what I experience. They give me less encouragement to condemn the arising of these feelings so harshly as I once did. 'Longing' also has the advantage that it describes the sort of feeling that often motivates our spiritual quest, showing that greed is often misdirected love.

It is important to emphasise how fleeting these images are, and how I must not get interested in them. They are simply examples of the sorts of

ephemeral visual objects of the senses that arise and pass in zazen. They are so fleeting that the act of writing about them seems to give them a solidity and importance that they do not possess. But for me they have helped illuminate part of the landscape in seemingly mundane zazen, and also shown me that it is not good to judge myself so harshly when I get distracted. The emoticons are like the thoughts in that if I play around with them and get interested, then I make them into expressions of delusion; when I am simultaneously accepting and letting go of them, they can all be expressions of reality.

Bob McGraw, Lay Minister

¹ For the dinosaurs amongst us emoticons are little symbols that can be included in text messages or emails to indicate emotion.

² These are available on CD and have been published in booklet form, available from Throssel Hole Bookshop



Keith Mothersson

8th May 1948 – 4th July 2009

It was with great sadness that we heard recently of the premature and unexpected death of Keith apparently due to heart failure.

I was not a close friend, knowing him only through our attendance and journeys to the Dundee meetings of the OBC. However I feel greatly privileged to have spent some time with such an extraordinary and exceptionally kind-hearted man.

Keith felt the world's pain almost unbearably. He shared it and tried to right the world's wrongs. He felt passionately about the injustices in the world and his compassion moved him to campaign against all forms of oppression and to promote peace and understanding in the face of conflict.

At the memorial service, held in the Centre for the Blind in Perth, there were many moving tributes from family and friends from an amazingly broad range of faiths and cultural backgrounds. As well as the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives there were many from the Perth group of the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order and the Stathmiglo group of the Order of Interbeing.

There were many Christians present and also people from the Muslim faith from Africa and Asia, other faiths and many organisations in which Keith was an active and valued member.

We learn from his brother that he had been born in Accra, Ghana, to Christian missionary parents and that he was sent away to school in Scotland at an early age. We heard both of his athletic and academic achievements and learnt more about his drive and campaigning activities.

Keith did not accept the world on face value. He had a healthy scepticism and questioned much of the conventional worldview as portrayed by the media, which could be very challenging.

His brother described Keith as inspirational and infuriating in equal measures. On reflection I feel he was more inspirational.

He would always include and think of others before himself and made prison visits as part of the Angulimala service.

It was most fitting that as his body was lowered into the earth at the woodland burial site the rain poured down, like the waters of compassion washing away the troubles of the world and also dissolving the words on the pages of the scripture book held in the hands of Reverend Favian.

Homage to the Buddha

Homage to the Dharma

Homage to the Sangha

Robin Baker

The Tentative Buddhist

So here I am, writing a piece for the newsletter after having put it off for so long. The motivation is that after three years (has it really been that long?) I'm about to move away from Edinburgh and may never see most of you in the Portobello Sangha again. I'm aware that I'm quite vocal, and I'm sure anyone who comes to Portobello on a Wednesday night will be aware of that too, but now is the time to commit some thoughts in writing.

I had a conversation with a friend a few weeks past about his position regarding metaphysics. He talked about the spectrum of academic thinking between the existentialists and spiritualists at one end, and the nihilists at the other and thought he fell somewhere right in the middle with what is called "absurdism". I replied that I lean far more towards the nihilist end of things, which surprised him because he thought that my being a Buddhist would make me much more sympathetic to the existentialist view. However, the way I see it is that this spectrum is a spectrum of Buddhism. Some Buddhists take a mystical view, while others are much more pragmatic and realist about "only the present moment", and this is what is often mistakenly construed to be full blown nihilism.

I find a pleasing analogy for the relation that individuals and the present moment have to reality as a whole (and it can only be an analogy, which I don't want to push too far since it will sound awfully clichéd and, as words must, miss the point, but bear with me) in the structure of modern theories in physics (I would, wouldn't I). These theories rely on local symmetry and global unity. Local symmetry reflects the freedom of every point in space-time to be represented in a different way according to some state space. This is reflected in the philosophy of the presentists, and I think in Zen philosophy, when we talk about existence itself being somehow relative i.e. what I perceive right here, right now, is everything: "the solipsism of the present."

I recently went to an Edinburgh University Philosophy Society lecture where this "everything that exists is here" view was attacked and made to seem ridiculous in light of experience. Modern physics has no problem with this solipsism, however, since it demands that each different viewpoint be reconciled causally to the whole, and this is achieved by means of the forces of nature that carry the local symmetry from place to place and ensure global coherence (it is demanding this global unity that actually leads us to predict the existence of previously

unknown forces in the "Standard Model"). This reminds me of Dogen's theory of time, and how in Zen we relate our own individual experience to a unified Buddha Nature by recognising the interrelatedness of all things.

Like I said, I only think this is a helpful analogy and don't for a minute think there is some grand connection and that Zen and theoretical physics are in fact talking about the same thing.

Quite blatantly our interpretation of reality has no bearing on reality itself, which will carry on blissfully (un)aware. This is what led me to the title of this piece: "The Tentative Buddhist". After three years of near daily meditation and weekly priory attendance it would be easy to think that I have totally accepted Buddhism, but I haven't, and I think for good reason. Simply accepting Buddhism would mean ceasing to enquire about its nature, and whilst this may be the style of some traditions I do not think it is the style of our own. I try to keep an open mind to the possibility that new experience could drastically alter my world view.

The past year has been hectic both academically, nearing the end of my undergraduate career and getting ready to start doctoral studies, and socially, having to adjust to life after a long term relationship. Immersing myself in these problems has been necessary,

but has led to my lack of intellectual engagement with Buddhism, i.e. I'm no longer reading "Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind" every night and pondering the nature of the polished tile. So when I sit, there is a plainer engagement with the meditation. I'm much more often lost with the monkey mind instead of focusing hard on "what is this?", but at the same time I think I have come to sit with that monkey mind much more comfortably. This throws up all kinds of questions like "well if this is just monkey mind now, and it was monkey mind earlier whilst I was on the bus then why bother with all this Zen lark anyway?". What is it that Zen does that is different from normal experience? I can't answer that question. Sometimes I think the answer is "nothing", and that is good, and sometimes I think the answer is "nothing", and that is bad (sometimes still, the answer is "no-thing"). Zen does give a light to the present moment and assigns it significance. This is very important to me because it is all too easy to get idealistic about the past, and to think that the only good things to come are in the future. Zen practice helps me to enjoy right now and take the present moment for what it is. To enjoy the ride on the bus instead of always thinking about the destination, as cliché as that sounds. Try it next time you ride the bus.

To come back to physics. On

“facebook” I list my religious views as: “Zen, $SU(3) \times SU(2) \times U(1)$ ”. The last set of symbols refers to the symmetry group of the Standard Model of Particle Physics. This statement is light hearted in some ways, but also reflects more of my attitude as a “tentative Buddhist”. I think the Standard Model is (one of) the greatest intellectual achievement(s) of humanity to date, and I am constantly learning more about it and find myself in awe of its beauty. I also know that there are people who know more about it than me, and still further I know, as every other physicist does, that it is incomplete for

various famous reasons. That does not stop me believing in it, and being confident that I understand at least some of what it has to say about reality. It does keep me awake at night.

Thank you all for my time at Portobello, I’ve always felt warmly welcomed. Especially thanks to Myra and Neil for all the lifts home on Wednesday nights, to Bill for Burns nights that I’ll remember for years to come, and of course thanks to Reverend Favian for wise words.

David Marsh – ‘Doddy’

(We wish Doddy well in his new post-Edinburgh life and will miss his presence in the Priory—and hope that one day he will return and explain ‘the symmetry group of the Standard Model of Particle Physics’ to scientific ignoramuses such as myself! Ed.)



(A Prospect) Of Throssel Hole Abbey

Up past the pets' graves and compassionate Kanzeon.
Below, a hermit's hut? (or contemplation shed for one)?
Beside a burn gushing fresh and clean, everywhere
Rabbits bolt and run, some just hop it down a hole.
At Throssel the blameless bunnies live in peace.

On up, the steeping slope clears, the prospect opens,
Revealing the big wide, ancient, farm dotted valley
Across, the wind carries its own sleekit whisper, mingled
With that forlorn keen that only sheep can keep.
A smudge of mist obscures my point of view.

Beyond a deep wet gash, behind a dry-stane dyke
Another sound whistles 'peewit', sharper edged, catches,
My attention drawn to a ritual in a tussocked field
Where a flapping lapwing to protect her nest, swoops
Low swipes around a cock pheasant's bobbing head.

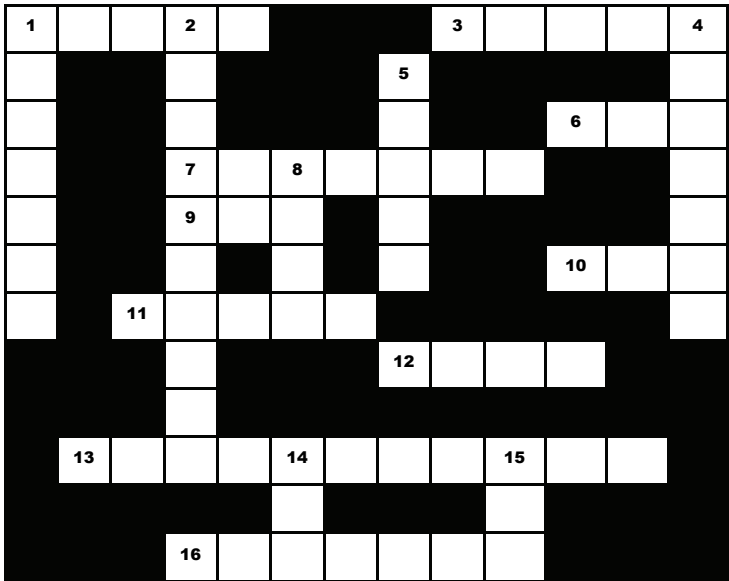
Here on the hillside, I stand connected in truth
To this event. Not separate, but participant, present,
Absolute, in this moment, nowhere to be, but here, now.
The lapwing rests, then up again she dives and feints
Ready for another round, the pheasant resumes his role.

Returned, some time later I sit in meditation, then within
The quietude of Throssel's silent bustle, mindfully
To read in Roshi Jiyu-Kennett's 'Wild White Goose'
Of harsher times not too long ago, but far away, I move
Once more to help with that which needs to be done.

From a distance the prospect of Throssel Hole Abbey changes ,
Naturally , light and shade move subtly, my view shifts
Time distorts the clarity of that which cannot be fully known
Only felt, but the change feels real, the shift deeper reaching
The view forever altered, no dependence on words or letters.

David Campbell

Cross – Zenword puzzle!



ACROSS

- 1 Action resulting from cause
- 3 Neither trying to ????? nor trying not to ?????
- 6 Ch'an
- 7 an offering which smells pleasant
- 9 the Way
- 10 Just ??? With no deliberate thought
- 11 not moving, being ?????
- 12 when the opposites arise, the Buddha ??? Is lost
- 13 Item 7 of Eightfold Path
- 16 that which is realised at the time of enlightenment

DOWN

- 1 Another name for Avalokiteshwara
- 2 Rules for ??????????
- 4 Rev Master Jiyu-???????
- 5 Meditation Hall
- 8 Zen is C???
- 14 ???, when the opposites arise.....
- 15 a long period of time

*With thanks
to Gordon
Edwards*



*Thank you to all the contributors to this issue of the Newsletter.
Deadline for next issue is the end of November 2009.*





- Events elsewhere in Scotland with the Prior -

September 2009

Friday 25th	Aberfeldy group evening	6.30-9.30pm
Saturday 26th	Dundee group morning	10am-1pm
Sunday 27th	Aberdeen Day Retreat	10am-4pm

October

Friday 23rd	Aberfeldy group evening	7.30-9pm
Saturday 24th	Dundee group morning	10am-1pm
Sunday 25th	Aberdeen Day Retreat	10am-4pm

November

Friday 20th	Aberfeldy group evening	7.30-9pm
Saturday 21st	Dundee group morning	10am-1pm
Sunday 22nd	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 evenings

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.

September 12th, 10th October, 14th November, 12th December.

7.00pm onwards

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*