

—Portobello Buddhist Priory—



A Temple of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives



Trees in a wintry Hermitage, Edinburgh

Calendar of Events January-April 2011

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— Welcome to all —

Portobello Buddhist Priory, a ground floor flat in the Portobello district of Edinburgh, opened in 1998. It is one of a handful of temples in Britain which are affiliated to the Community of Buddhist Contemplatives. The training monastery of the Community at Throssel Hole near Hexham in Northumberland was founded in 1972 by Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett, an Englishwoman who trained within the Soto Zen tradition at one of its main monasteries in Japan. The resident Prior at Portobello is one of the senior monks from Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey.

The purpose of the Priory is to offer lay training within the Serene Reflection Meditation tradition (Soto Zen) to anyone who sincerely seeks to undertake it, and the prior's role is to support such training. The prior and members of the congregation are also involved in activities such as religious education, hospital and prison visiting.

All are warmly invited to join in the Priory's programme of lay practice, the purpose of which is to come to know and live from our True Nature, whose expression is our wise and compassionate living.

With kindest wishes from Rev Favian, Prior

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

- Weekend events at the Priory -

January 2011

Sunday 9th	Renewal of Precepts	11am
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February

Sunday 13th	Festival of the Buddha's Renunciation	11am
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April

Sunday 3rd	Renewal of Precepts	11am
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The Priory is open to visitors as well as trainees every day from
6.45am - 9.15pm
except Mondays, Thursday afternoons, and Sunday pm.

*(Please phone beforehand, and please note when the Prior
is holding retreats elsewhere)*

Newsletter

no. 37

December 2010

— Prior's Notes —

I am of that age now when, to sit with other middle-aged folks is to find oneself comparing notes on our various ailments; the arthritic joints, and the medical read-out number which is starting to show up on the wrong side of the official health line. The flip side of these conversations can be the enthusing and promoting of our health regimes, special diets and exercise.

All of this can be fine and good, but sometimes and at some point we may feel that 'still small voice' asking; "What's this about?"

Speaking personally, what it's about can often be my fearful mind obsessing and resisting the manifestations of impermanence.

The Buddha saw the 'four sights'; old age, sickness, death and the spiritual seeker. We may find ourselves dwelling on the first three, without engaging the fourth. A zen comment relating to this, states: 'Our lives are like leaky boats put out to sea'. We can spend our lives trying to plug the holes, but this boat is inevitably going down.

We can perhaps recognise that our Practice helps to open the obsessive identification with the 'me' boat, towards a wider perspective of the ocean world. We are familiar with the little boat world as the imperfect state, where the marks of

impermanence are daily visible. But our attempts to protect our lives beyond what is good and wise is symptomatic of living the delusion that we are only separate selves with, for some, the belief option of eternal life.

This 'self' then becomes driven by fear and desire, and is in fact an expression of resistance to the connectivity of the universe all around us.

Every time we sit zazen the invitation is there to see and let go the seeming security of the 'known', the grasping and identifying movements of the mind. To risk the feel of the ocean world, its ex-

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pansiveness, buoyancy and beauty, to learn to swim here, as well as caring for the boat, are in the end, not two separate activities.

Our lives are deeper and more boundless than we know.

Tuning In

One of the qualities that seems important in our practice is receptivity.

In zazen, we can often see how active the mind is and how we have been in the habit of believing thoughts at face value without asking if they are true or not. Seeing this helps us to let the flow of thoughts come and go of itself. The thoughts are still there but there is also a sense of something greater than them. It feels quite subtle and impossible to pin down. It does seem to help to have a sense of listening, or engaging with this subtlety. In everyday situations, when I become caught up in passing thoughts and feelings there is a desire to act impulsively, often in order to get relief from unpleasant feelings or chase after positive ones. In the “just sitting” of zazen, accepting whatever we notice, we are connecting with this receptivity.

Habits of mind have a lot of momentum, and there are a number of Buddhist forms that help us in this process of going deeper. Bowing is one of these. The “meaning” of bowing is

within the act itself. The physical posture expresses a very direct letting go of the self. Similarly, ceremonies come to life when we engage with them. The activities have a specific form and we simply follow these in the ceremony. We don’t have to make decisions such as “will I walk in this direction or that direction”. Yet in this act of following something unique occurs and no two ceremonies are the same. In fact, we do make a choice, which is to turn up the ceremony and engage with it rather than watching it from the sidelines. Also, from moment to moment there are “micro-decisions” like where I look or how loud I sing. Most of these occur naturally.

Another aspect of our practice which is helpful is the teaching of senior monks. We are fortunate in having contact with people who have made a deep commitment to the practice, who have a long experience following it and who are willing to pass on their insights. Some of our forms express respect for this teaching, such as making gassho when a monk comes into a room to give a dharma talk.

This expression of receptivity then starts to permeate our everyday life. We can start to let go of our own self-interest and tune in to what is actually going on. How to act in that moment then becomes clearer. This is much easier to describe than to do and things can sometimes feel very “muddy” and unclear. I find it helpful

in these situations to tune in to that muddiness. What I tend to find is that I am making judgments about myself or the situation. This insight in itself is helpful in moving forward and acting from a place of respect.

Neil Rothwell

In Gratitude —



Sangha walkers buffeted by the wind on Carnethy Hill on the first walk—17th October

The Portobello Sangha's response to the calling for help in raising funds to replace a somewhat threadbare Priory carpet was magnificent. Not just one, but two sponsored hillwalks took place in the Pentland Hills on 17th and 24th of October. There was more offered than money and more gained than carpet. Thank you to all.

David Campbell

Questions to consider

“I can’t go on anymore”

This morning outside the window
A fly hangs dead on an invisible cord
Dangling like young Toni Kurtz
On the north face of the Eiger - so close
To life but unreachable - he said only
“Ich kann nicht mehr”

When last night almost too tired
From sitting still I found the Plough
Hidden exactly behind the window catch
This eclipse would have passed unwitnessed
Had I not been awake at that moment
To feel that I could in faith go on

David Campbell



*The climber Toni Kurtz
(1913-36)*

Attentiveness

Production of our calendar and newsletter is not an onerous task : fitting the text of the congregation’s offerings into the available space is an interesting puzzle, although from a design point of view, a more skilled eye and a larger (but more expensive) format would be welcome: more images, more white space perhaps, and less dense text.

Those who have been coming to the Priory for some years will remember the large and wheezing photocopier

we used to have. Printing the newsletter on this was something of a challenge, given its quirks which were by turn exasperating and endearing, including a propensity to jam (did I learn the internal anatomy of that copier!), to run out of toner, and—occasionally and inexplicably— to die, usually at the most inconvenient times. It required constant attention and adjustment as, for example, when the heat of first-side printing would cause the paper to shrink, requiring guides to be adjusted before second-side printing.

And then to be readjusted back to the original settings for the next batch, given that it sulkily refused to print more than 20 copies at a time. And so on.

By contrast, the current system of emailing the newsletter to a printer and, two days later, picking up 200 crisply printed, folded and stapled booklets is a very welcome simplification.

However, there are other things involved – updating the mailing list database, and printing out the addressed envelopes. The latter, because of limitations of our current printer, requires that the envelopes are fed one at a time, every few seconds, into the printer by hand. The process takes about one hour and is usually shared with Rev Favian, a bundle of envelopes in our hands being fed alternately into the printer which chirps and rocks like an hungry chick in a nest.

Some time ago, as Rev Favian was otherwise occupied, I did this on my own. Feeding envelopes into a printer for an hour is not, as they say, rocket science: it is an entirely straightforward manual task – but, as I quickly discovered, a powerful exercise in mindfulness. Suddenly an envelope caught my eye – surely that person had moved away? And what was their new address? Did we have it? Attention wavered – quick, put the envelope to the side, grab a new one – oh blast, too late – printer

sputtering and spitting it out with the address printed away off to one side – do I reject it? How do I pause the programme? More hesitation – quick, quick – and that person – should they still be on the list? And who is that? Is it the person who usually sits there on a Wednesday evening – I discovered that trying to insert envelopes at the very last second at speed and with force simply doesn't work, in much the same way that you can't push a piece of string across a table. Wrestling to get back into an orderly sequence reminded me of Charlie Chaplin in *Modern Times*, struggling with his two spanners to recapture his place on the production line, having been diverted by a fly buzzing round his head.

Next I spotted the name of someone who had died, for goodness sake: that envelope should certainly not be sent out. And someone who is a regular attender, and who doesn't need an envelope at all. And had there been an envelope for X who had written an article? How offended s/he would be if they didn't even get a copy of the newsletter – perhaps I should make a quick note of their name to check – quickly, hurry – a haphazard series of sub-piles began to emerge on all available surfaces, reflecting an attempt on the hoof to organise all the problematic categories apart from the main stack. Production faltered and the printer fell silent on several occasions, deprived of its supply of envelopes.

This was not unlike aspects of formal meditation, it seemed to me. There was nothing wrong with spotting names, for whatever reason – if you spot them, you spot them – natural rather than deliberate thinking. My difficulties started by translating that into the urge for immediate action – reacting – somewhat in the same way that deliberately following a thought in meditation does. With the benefit of hindsight, the thing to do would have been to print all the envelopes and then go through them, sorting out whatever needed to be sorted out. And so why didn't I? Why couldn't I just attend to what needed to be done – just that, and nothing more?

I was reminded of Eliot's words:

‘ - - slip, slide, perish,

Decay with imprecision, will not stay
in place,

Will not stay still.’

In meditation, these words often reflect the experience for me— an unruliness, thoughts wandering off like curious toddlers. On closer examination, a significant portion of the unruliness seems to be to do with a kind of unconscious ‘to do’ list – ah, must remember to do/watch/sort out/get/read/fix/think about/understand/experience that.

But why? What's behind that? Something said by Rev Master Daishin came to mind:

“We're squirrely little creatures sometimes. We're even devious creatures, not because we necessarily have a motive to be devious, but we're devious towards ourselves and we mistake where the refuge lies. We kind of feel that, well, somehow if I really get it together, everything'll be all right. And we have our own particular versions of what getting it together means - - - So what has to go is this sense of where we're going; this sense of what it is that the refuge consists of, what it is that I'll achieve to make things OK. And that's because we can see, if we look carefully, that however much we get or achieve, it's like a big hole; we go on shovelling these things into that hole, and somehow the hole never gets filled up. We get to the end of our lives with that way of looking at things - - -”.

A squirrel-iness, then! A desire to organise, sort and fix – and right now! I was irresistibly reminded of the scene in the cartoon film *Ice Age* (my excuse is that I have grandchildren) where the squirrel clinging to the thawing ice-face tries to balance the elusive acorn on his head while plugging leaks with fingers, toes, nose and tongue, eyes frantically darting about trying to spot the next spurt of water.

The poet Paul Celan said that attentiveness is the common prayer of the human soul. While some of the words are not usually associated with Buddhism, the deeper meaning seems to point to something we are familiar with: the fittingness of just attending

to that which is this, here, now – and what it asks of us. To do this—simply this—seems to require a trust and faith that the need to ‘fix’ can be safely let go of.

Bill Grieve

On looking out to sea —

Today, I go to work
Like a cormorant
Diving for its catch.
Wholeheartedly
Into the unknown.



Shooie

Comfort for the Cold

The last Saturday in November, just at the start of the cold and snowy weather, I was travelling by train from London to Dundee. A short while after pulling out of Kings Cross I noticed that the compartment was cold. The ticket inspector told us that nothing could be done about the heating in our coach, so I put on my jacket and scarf and prepared for a long, cold journey. I took out the reading I had brought, Rev. Daishin Morgan's: Buddha recognises Buddha, and with a wry smile I remembered that I had been reading the chapter on 'Acceptance'! I opened it and read: 'Acceptance and reality are the same thing; acceptance is the state of being in accord with reality. It is like a wave wherein the conditions of the past are giving rise to the form of the present. The wave is us and the situation together. Even though we may believe that we are separate, we are still one with the wave.' I was suddenly filled with joy; I forgot the cold, and was totally taken over by the realisation that for all of us in that coach, at that moment, our myriad life experiences and paths had brought us together and this was our (shared) reality. I looked around with 'new' eyes at my fellow pas-

sengers. Some had put on scarves or zipped up their jackets, but, on the whole, they seemed unfazed by the prospect of a long, cold journey. There were a few jokey remarks and some people hurried off to get warm drinks at the buffet car. British stiff-upper-lip? Or letting life show us the particular offering that we are called to make?

I no longer feared the long hours to be spent in an unheated carriage (“To know yourself to be the wave is to lose your worries about life and death”). In fact, I don’t know where the time went! When the train got a bit quieter after Kirkcaldy, I moved to a warm coach. I still felt the peace, joy and feeling of ‘oneness’ with the others whose reality and acceptance I had shared.

Marianna Buultjens

Faith—?

Faith and Religion

At one of our ‘dharma discussions’ at the Priory during the past year the subject of the role of faith in Buddhist practice was raised. I sometimes think that, by now, I should be able to produce a fluent definition of what faith is – however I find that this is not the case. Part of the difficulty is that, within our western society, faith is almost always equated with religion and religion/faith is generally perceived to be in decline – the retreat of the ‘sea of faith’. In the last census in Scotland 27% of the population declared that they had no religion and a further 5% declined to answer. Thus between one-quarter and one-third of the population of Scotland are ‘religionless’ - are they also ‘faithless’? Such a conclusion is, I think, highly debatable.

When faith is judged to be no more than an equivalent term for religion, it is generally associated with ‘belief’ in specific statements, texts or creeds, assent to which is required of those claiming membership. Conversely those who do not assent to the credal statements are excluded or, not uncommonly, persecuted. However I do not feel that it is necessary to equate faith with particular religious forms though there may be and often is, a connection – religion without faith has become a disconnected formalism, faith without religious expression of some kind may lack the manifestation of compassionate form.

Waiting

When listening to the discussion at the Priory my mind was drawn back to lines in T S Eliot’s ‘East Coker’, the second poem of the Four Quartets which contains several passages which have impressed themselves on my memory. Per-

haps East Coker has a special significance for me as it was written by Eliot in the early months of the 1939-45 war at a time when, as an impressionable eight year old, I was evacuated with my mother to a remote Somerset village not far from East Coker during that period of uneasy waiting that followed the declaration of war. The opening of the poem conveys both the character of a remote Somerset village and the tensions of the time. The passage I was trying to recall was:

*'I said to my soul be still, and wait without hope
For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without love
For love would be love of the wrong thing, there is yet faith
But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting'*¹

The word 'waiting' is interesting both in the way it is used by Eliot in this poem and more generally – its early uses were often connected to waiting in ambush for an enemy – which is certainly 'waiting without love' and is 'hope for the wrong thing'! But later its meaning became extended to include a waiting upon in which one is willing to give and/or accept service as when we wait upon our teachers – in the sense of a willingness to make ourselves available. I associate this attitude with the Buddhist pilgrim Sudhana in the Gandavyuha sutra who was willing to 'wait upon' many teachers to learn the practices of a Bodhisattva. The Welsh poet R S Thomas also had interesting things to say about waiting in relation to his experience of prayer – indeed he wrote two separate poems entitled 'Waiting' but the following one entitled 'Kneeling' resonates most closely with the Eliot quoted above:

*Prompt me God;
But not yet. When I speak
Though it will be you who speak
Through me, something is lost
The meaning is in the waiting'*²

Within these quoted verses there is something which I find relates to our Buddhist meditation practice – and though zazen is neither waiting for or even waiting on – but 'just sitting' it seems to have some relation to the latter in the sense of being a willing receptiveness.

Faith in the Ultimate Source

In his very helpful exploration³ of the Buddhist understanding of faith Rev Berwyn quoted, from the classic Mahayana work *The Awakening of Faith*, a passage which describes four faiths. Three of them we recognise as the three refuges of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha but the fourth is faith in the 'ultimate source.' Dogen maintains that 'Faith is one with the fruit of enlightenment, the

fruit of enlightenment is one with faith. Therefore it is said that faith is the entrance to the ocean of the Dharma'.⁴ This reminds one of Dogen's equation of practice with enlightenment.

I understand the Jewish scholar Martin Buber to have said that *'in the beginning was relationship'*. This to me chimes with the intuition of connectedness that we sometimes encounter in Buddhist practice and which is expressed formally in the teaching of dependent origination and, imaginatively, in the metaphor of Indra's Net. Whether we can equate 'faith in the ultimate source' with Buber's faith in the relationship 'at the beginning' is an interesting question. For Dogen, relationship as expressed in dependent origination does not appear to be ultimate. In the *Shobogenzo* Dogen posits something which he calls *Gyōji* or 'unremitting activity' as prior to dependent origination saying: 'Dependent origination (*engi*) is ceaseless effort (*gyōji*) because ceaseless effort is not caused by dependent origination'. (Kim, an authority on Dogen's texts, considers that this is one of the most important passages in the *Shobogenzo*).⁵

Perhaps relations which cannot be conceived intellectually can be manifested in action. I am reminded of the experience attributed to Great Master Tozan, our 38th Ancestor, as expounded in his poem:

*Long seeking it through others,
I was far from reaching it.
Now I go by myself;
I meet it everywhere.
It is just I myself,
And I am not itself,
Understanding this way,
I can be as I am.'*⁶

Rawdon Goodier

¹ Eliot T S *East Coker* III Lines 123-126

² Thomas R S *Kneeling*. Collected Poems p 199

³ Rev Berwyn Watson JOBC 19.3 2004

⁴ Dogen. *Shobogenzo Sanjishichihon bodaibumpa* trans.Kim 2004 in Eihei Dogen, *Mystical Realist* p 65

⁵ Dogen. *Shobogenzo Gyōji* Trans Kim 1965 in *Flowers of Emptiness* p 193,198

⁶ Sekida 1977 *Two Zen Classics. Hekiganroku* p267. See also trans. in the *Denkoroku*



***Thank you to all the contributors to this issue of the Newsletter.
Deadline for next issue is mid-April 2011.***





- Events elsewhere in Scotland with the Prior -

February 2011

Friday 25th	Aberfeldy group evening	7.30-9pm
Saturday 26th	Dundee group morning	10am-1pm
Sunday 27th	Aberdeen Day Retreat	10am-4pm

March

Friday 25th	Aberfeldy group evening	7.30-9pm
Saturday 26th	Dundee group morning	10am-1pm
Sunday 27th	Aberdeen Day Retreat	10am-4pm

April

Friday 22nd	Aberfeldy group evening	7.30-9pm
Saturday 23rd	Dundee group morning	10am-1pm
Sunday 27th	Aberdeen Day Retreat	10am-4pm

For further details please phone :

Aberdeen –	Bob McGraw or Joyce & Gordon Edward	(01330) 824339 (01467) 681525
Aberfeldy –	Robin Baker	(01887) 820339
Dundee –	Elliott Forsyth	(01333) 451788

— Day-to-day schedule at Portobello Buddhist Priory —

Daily (Every day except Mondays, Thursday afternoons & Sunday p.m.)

MORNING

7.00 Meditation

7.40 Morning service

EVENING

7.30 Meditation

7.55 Walking meditation

8.00 Meditation

8.30 Evening office

Early morning practice

You can come for early morning meditation, followed by short morning service.

7.00am –
8.15am

Evening practice

Meditation, walking meditation, meditation, evening office.
You are welcome to stay on for tea.

7.30pm –
8.45pm

Introductory afternoons

Will be held on the second Saturday of each month. A short talk about Buddhist practice and the Serene Reflection Meditation (Soto Zen) tradition.
Meditation instruction and discussion.

Saturday 8th January, 12th February, 12th March, 9th April.

2.30-4pm

Wednesday and Friday evenings

Midday service and meditation, followed by tea and a Dharma talk /discussion, evening office.

7.30pm–9.30pm

Sunday mornings

Meditation from 9.30am onwards, followed either by a Ceremony, Dharma discussion or Festival at 11am. It is fine to arrive or leave at 10.45am

9.30am–
12.30pm

Festival mornings

Priory open for meditation from 9.30am, or come at 10.45am for the ceremony.

*Portobello Buddhist Priory is Scottish Charity no. SCO31788
Prior: Reverend Favian Straughan*