

—Portobello Buddhist Priory—



A Temple of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives



*Sangha gathering at Portobello Priory
on the occasion of Rev Master Favian's 10th Anniversary as Prior*

Calendar of Events

September - December 2013

Portobello Buddhist Priory
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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 Master Favian, Prior

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

- Weekend events at the Priory -

September 2013

Sunday 22nd	Renewal of Precepts	11am
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October

Sunday 20th	Renewal of Precepts	11am
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November

Wednesday 27th	Festival of the Buddha's Enlightenment	7.30pm
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December

Tuesday 31st	New Year's Festival	7.00- 10.30pm
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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.

(Visitors—please phone beforehand, and please note when the Prior is holding retreats elsewhere: see inside back page)

— Prior's Notes —

At our Sunday ceremony which also marked my 10th year as Prior, I found myself standing at the altar saying something about how little I seemed to know but with a sense that faith had deepened and that gratitude was here sharing my training with this Sangha.

I am struck reflecting on this idea of 10 years and what it refers to in terms of training. Yes, events mark our sense of personal history but time spent training doesn't seem to quite fit that category. My 'not knowing' feels a bit like an admission of guilt, a sense of lack perhaps and a need to find markers of achievement over this period of time. But this is only a partial sense. 10 years is also a keeping faith with the practice, as best we can, day by day, no matter what; and although we can only do our own training, to have a flesh and blood Sangha to support and challenge you along the way is a genuine source of gratitude, and that we have this temple, a space to gather and be, is a truly remarkable thing.

Even given all this, what faith and gratitude also seem to arise from is something both more nebulous and immediate. In learning to let go into the present again and again and getting distracted again and again and yet returning to this

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centre again, something is discovered about the nature of ourselves and this present moment.

There is no real separation. 'Now' is not just another tick of the clock, but has a boundless quality, however fleetingly felt, along with a presence that may just register as a sense of aliveness, without the usual need to grab after anything else, not even a self-conscious nod of recognition. And these moments are so quiet and eventless we can't dress them up as spiritual achievement, and in fact the

notion leaves a bad taste in the mouth. But mysteriously they do seem to subtly usher in faith, not in any object but in the nebulous sense of ‘this has value and is enough’: and ‘this’ is not just whatever the conditions of the present appear to be but also something of the holding space they seem to arise in. Just life, just existence doing its thing and yet it can leave you, like the young child in Isaac Newton’s image, standing paddling at the sea shore with the whole deep mystery of the universe before you.

The beautiful Buddha scroll which the Sangha presented now hangs on the back wall of the meditation room, facing the Buddha on the altar. And we sit in the middle of this wonderful representation of Buddha recognising Buddha, getting caught up in mind waves, letting go, getting caught, returning to centre....held.



Our Lewis Retreat —

In mid-July four of us from the Highland sangha met up on the Isle of Lewis, in the Outer Hebrides, for a weekend retreat. We were joined by Reverend Finnan from Throssel Hole and Neil Rothwell from the Edinburgh sangha, who both travelled about 480 miles and 310 miles respectively (each way) to attend. Martin, from Lewis, was the one who had travelled the least to join the sangha which was unusual and made a nice change.

After meeting in Inverness on the Friday morning we drove north to Ullapool in two cars, stopping by the Black Water river on the way to stretch our legs. Standing atop the old cattle drovers bridge we watched people enjoying the warm temperatures and jumping from a ledge into the dark pool below.

The ferry crossing to Lewis was in fine weather and two and three quarter hours after leaving the mainland we docked in Stornoway having passed the many little islands of the Summer Isles on the Ullapool side and then the Shiants on the Lewis side. The temperature at Lewis was a good few degrees cooler than it had been on the mainland when we left.

After settling in to our wee cottage which a friend of Martin's had generously let us use for our stay there, we

enjoyed a hot bowl of soup and went over the schedule for the retreat. This was followed by Vespers and before long we had all retired to our beds for the night.

Since a visit to Lewis is a rare thing for most of us we spent the larger part of Saturday doing some sightseeing. After morning meditation and breakfast, Martin suggested a few sights to aim for and we settled for a good circuitous route, taking in some of the main tourist attractions. Lewis is an island that is steeped in history, some of which has thankfully been preserved to this day, so we set off to go back through the ages.

We started our tour by getting a feel for the ancient spiritual life of the islanders. Callanish standing stones are thought to have been erected around 5000 years ago and are quite awe inspiring. The rock that these stones are made from is called Lewisian Gneiss and is the oldest in the UK, being formed up to three billion years ago - making them two thirds the age of the Earth! We spent time wandering between the many monoliths and absorbing the atmosphere. My mind was wondering how and why and when the great effort to make this monument took place. And to place my hand where many hands have been through



The Callanish standing stones

the centuries gave a new feel to the passage of time.

After a cup of tea we drove to a broch (Iron Age fort) called Dun Carloway. It is roughly half the age of Callanish standing stones and consists of two tall cylindrical stone walls - an inner and outer - tapering in towards the top, with space to walk round in the cavity between the walls (which some of us did). The living space was in the courtyard inside the inner walls. It is known to have still been used as a fort in the 16th century and it was also known to have been inhabited until as late as the 1870's. Here, we sat amongst the

sheep and enjoyed our lunch in lee of the wind.

Our next stop was at the Black House village in Garrannan. Black houses get their name from the fact that there was no chimney and the smoke from the central hearth filled the living area and soon turned everything black. These were the common dwellings for centuries and were often shared with the cattle and livestock over the harsh winters, with the very thick stone walls and thatched roof keeping the elements out and the warmth in.

After a nice long walk along the coast

from the village - stopping to look at St. Kilda off in the distance - we returned to the black house village where we were given a talk and demonstration by a crofter, Roddy Morrison, on how Harris Tweed was - and still is - made in the Outer Hebrides. Saved from extinction by new management, good advertising and renewed interest across the world, we were told that Harris Tweed is becoming a viable way to earn a living once again for some crofters on the island. He explained that all Harris Tweed must be made on the actual weaver's croft and made on a pedal loom, not a motorised one. These old policies are still in place and I felt hopeful that they may go some way towards ensuring the survival of a real cottage industry. During the demonstration, as Roddy started it up, I found the clacking noise from the shuttle as it was catapulted across the loom from side to side, quite alarming and wondered how he was not deaf by now!

Before we left the house we sat with Roddy in the living room by the fire and chatted, giving us a chance to feel what it was like in times of rest on the croft. The scent of burning peat rose from the fire, filling the room and carried my mind somewhere else, to an-



Dun Carloway broch

other time.

On our return run to the cottage, Martin took us over a long road across a large peat moor which is central to the Isle of Lewis. The island of Lewis, I'm told, is quite different from Harris to the south which is fairly mountainous and from the centre of this moor we could look right round in a circle with barely an undulation on the horizon. It is quite possibly the flattest, least featured part of Scotland I have ever been on, and quite an experience in itself.

Back at the cottage we made our evening meal and ate the lovely food together in silence.

After the kitchen clean up we finished the short evening with a sitting and Vespers. The cottage living room/kitchen area was *just* big enough for us to set up six sitting places and a little altar after moving the furniture around a bit and became a cosy little zendo when it was needed.



Black house village, Gearranman

The following day, Sunday, after breakfast, we drove into Stornoway to have our day retreat at a venue that Martin and Annie had found for us. The streets were very very quiet and barely a soul was to be seen at that time in the morning. Once at the venue we had a short morning service after our first sitting and our day retreat unfolded from there. The larger space allowed us to do walking meditation and Reverend Finnan was able to lead both a short morning service and midday service in the afternoon without too much of a squeeze.

After lunch we had a walk in the grounds of Lews Castle, opposite the harbour, where people were setting up big marquee tents in preparation for the summer Hebridean Celtic Festival the following weekend. Stornoway had become a lot busier than it had been earlier and we walked

with others past rhododendrons and tall trees and sculptures in the park before returning for midday service.

We finished our day in Stornoway with a dedication of merit and bows.

After another good meal at the cottage we settled down, as we have done at the Scottish Sangha retreats, to watch a film together. We watched a film of Martin's called "Seachd - The Inaccessible Pinnacle". Following on from our immersion into Celtic life, it was a film made in the Gaelic language (with subtitles) and was a story about storytelling - among other things. It was filmed on the island of Skye, south east of Lewis, and featured some amazing shots of the scenery and changeable weather and natural light there. After the film we joined for Vespers, set up the mini zendo for the morning and then retired to bed for the night.

Monday morning began with zazen and the Kesa verse, followed by breakfast and a cleanup of the cottage. We then paid a visit to Annie, just along the road, to thank her for her kind offerings of help to find a venue for the day retreat and some home-baking on our arrival to the island. Afterwards we went for a brisk walk down to the headland and lighthouse to see if we could spot any whales or dolphins which can often be seen from there. Not this time though! Still, it was a nice end to our time on the island; to have one last walk in the windy conditions - which is what a Leosach (a person from Lewis) experiences a lot of the year round, I hear.

Our return journey on the ferry was a bit choppier than the first trip and it seemed to take longer to pass for me. The ferry is a big boat capable of carrying over 120 cars and 600 passen-

gers, with a few different areas on-board to sit in. I chose to sit quietly in some reclining seats while my queasiness passed and with eyes closed, listened to the kids next to me asking granny twenty questions at a time. One of the most common being, “are we nearly there yet?”. I smiled as I remembered myself asking that favourite travelling question in my youth. I still do from time to time, but more quietly and less often these days.

With everyone's effort and generous offering the weekend was a great success; both interesting and enjoyable. And, as ever on our retreats, a wonderful chance to come together and share our Practice with each other as a sangha.

Shooie



Some reflections on letting go

To “let go” is one of the first things we hear when we learn to meditate and it remains a central feature of our ongoing training. It is something everybody can recognise. For example, a few years ago there was a campaign to reduce car use in Scotland. The slogan was “learn to let go”. This was used in the knowledge that people would readily relate to this phrase.

What do we let go of in meditation? This is different every time but in a broad sense we could call it suffering. For me, it is usually a stream of thoughts or ideas. The nature of attaching to these thoughts is to close off the immediate reality in front of us. We buy into a fantasy. The fantasy may be pleasant or unpleasant. An unpleasant fantasy might be worry or self-criticism, which is based on a fantasy of how we “should” be.

Letting go is something we can choose to do, once we realise we are holding on to something. One of the effects of deepening faith with continued practice is that the need to let go becomes clearer, as we learn from experience the consequences of clinging to things that are no longer useful. This is can be difficult for patterns that our deeply ingrained in our psyche. Because these patterns are so habitual, they are often not easy to see. Fortunately, the act of just sitting allows these to come into awareness over time.

Even when we do let go of an attachment, most of us have experienced how it can return a millisecond later! At one level, this is why we have to let go many, many times. At another level, like *the Golden Bell that rings but once*, letting go is a unique act that we can only do right now, when the call to do so arises. It does not really work to try to force our minds to stay aware – this is *trying not to think*, as Dogen puts it. Thoughts and fantasies are not a problem in themselves, but we know when we are buying into them.

What is left after we have let go? There may be the after-effects of our previous thoughts e.g. some tension, sadness or other emotion. We don’t need to try to let go of this – it is simply our body functioning in response to our mind. Within these sensations, there is an awakening to being, or awareness, that which we recognise, can never grasp but can always open up to. There is also a

sense of what to do right now. Planning can be very useful, but I am regularly struck by how impossible it is to define beforehand exactly what the best response should be in a particular moment. It is only something that can be discovered at the time. Typically, it is nothing very dramatic; for example, simply continuing what we are doing, or perhaps spend a moment looking inwards rather than outwards. What is different is a sense of being fully alive to life as it is presenting itself to us right now.

Neil Rothwell



Kanzeon

I recently went to the abbey in Throssel Hole for a Dharma Weekend that included the festival of Avalokiteshwara Bodhisattva. Of the many statues and icons in the zendo during the festival, I was particularly struck by one based on a version of Kanzeon describing him as having a thousand hands and a thousand eyes. Of course with any representation of Kanzeon, we are in the realm of images and metaphors - fingers pointing at the moon, rather than

the moon itself. But this particular image has always spoken to me, because it suggests to me the idea that, rather than Compassion being some separate being or god or goddess to be prayed to, the eyes of Compassion are our eyes, and the hands of Compassion are our hands.

Like any image or representation, this captures only part of the larger, boundless reality, of which Reverend Favian has reminded me and which has been discussed in a number of

talks by Reverend Master Daishin, that Compassion is, inherent in existence its self. (I'm reminded of two lines from Gary Snyder's "Myths & Texts" that I read just today: "Balanced on the boundless compassion / Of diatoms, lava, and chipmunks".)

Following the festival there was a Dharma talk and discussion led by Reverend Lambert (who was enjoying a break from kitchen duty). He was discussing the Scripture of Avalokiteshwara Bodhisattva, and suggesting some non-literal interpretations of the various scenarios set out in the scripture, in which fearful situations - as well as the salvation from them - are described. I had always interpreted the scripture as telling us that thinking of the Three Refuges and the nature of Compassion during times of suffering and fear would release us, not from the situation itself, but from the fear that is the real cause of the suffering in painful situations (remembering the words of the Litany of the Great Compassionate



Image of Kanzeon

One, which describes Kanzeon as "the one who leaps beyond all fear"). But the discussion opened my eyes to some other possibilities. At one point, Reverend Lambert compared Reverend Master Jiyu's translation with another, and I noted that while the other

translation used the second person, Reverend Master Jiyu's used the third. This meant that while the reader of the other translation was forced to identify with the sufferer who appeals to Kanzeon, the translation we use in our service left the question open: in fact, one could as easily identify with the tormenters as with the tormented.

And that would suggest that instead of reading the scripture as a promise that if we turn to Kanzeon in times of need we will be saved from our troubles, we could read it as a reminder that if Kanzeon is remembered when we are causing suffering to others, we will cease to do so. (Or at least try.)

Rick Woodward

Where is my true home? A story of moving around -

Moving to a new place— well, it seems to be a hobby of mine! Since I relocated from Nottingham to Edinburgh seven and a half years ago, I've had a total of nine different addresses! Such is the nature of renting and sharing. I'm sure we have all had experiences of (to put it very politely) not so great agents or landlords and unfathomable flatmates. Living with others can always be an opportunity for training!..

I decided that this time it was (literally) time to go for broke and live on my own. I very luckily found a small flat in Joppa. For those who don't know, Joppa is a small eastern suburb of Edinburgh. It is bounded on the north by the coast of the Firth of Firth, and on the west by Portobello. The agent that showed me around the flat said that it had been empty for a few months as people seemed to prefer to be closer to the city and it didn't have a lot of furniture. For me, this was the ideal, a blank canvas to work with. Just a minute's walk away from the seafront, and 10 minutes from the Priory. I paid my deposit the very next day..

I moved in in early July, and was only there for a week before I was off again to Throssel for a week for the summer Sesshin (for which I am immensely grateful, but that is another article!) When I returned, the flat felt quite strange. I had been so used to sharing my space with others. A strange kind of loneliness and fear hit me, but then I also felt a sense of freedom and spaciousness. As all thoughts and feelings do, they drifted away like clouds and I found my feet.

I'm very lucky that I have a few friends that live close by, and they have made me feel very welcome. Rev Master Favian kindly offered to 'Buddhist' my flat, and I gratefully accepted. Part of this was to give a name to the flat, which was quite a difficult decision, but I eventually settled on 'Quiet Sea Hermitage'. I can't really explain in words why I chose this name, it just seemed right. So, on 20th August, Rev Master Favian and a few friends came over to witness the giving of the Precepts to Quiet Sea Hermitage. It was a very lovely, and very moving ceremony and took me back to when I received the Precepts a few years ago. We processed around the flat chanting the Scripture of Great Wisdom, and I held a candle up into the four corners of each room and said the Three Homages. As it is quite a small flat this didn't take long, and we returned back at the altar and chanted Tisarana to finish off. We had celebratory tea and mochi afterwards to mark the occasion. This

is a fresh start. I'm not sure how long I will stay at Quiet Sea Hermitage, but it really does feel like a good place to live; bright and vibrant.

Over the recent years of moving around, I have found that there has always been one constant, and that is my true home. The place I go back to, but am never away from.

Debbie Sheringham



View from Quiet Sea Hermitage

Mudras in Buddhism: An Interpretation of the Five Positions or Stages in Training

A mudra is a symbolic or ritual gesture in Hinduism and Buddhism. While some mudras involve the entire body, most are performed with the hands and fingers.

In 2011, monks from Tashi Lhunpo Buddhist Monastery in India visited Aberdeen and demonstrated various ceremonies to the public. Many of the ceremonies included beautiful and elaborate

hand mudras which were performed simultaneously by all the Monks. I found these symbolic hand movements peaceful, fascinating and absorbing. As a Yoga Teacher, I'm familiar with some basic Yoga Hand mudras but had never thought to incorporate them into my unfolding understanding of Serene Reflection Meditation (SRM) practice. Rev Master Daishin Morgan's 'Buddha Recognises Buddha' is a book I constantly refer to – it is rich in the explanations of the teachings of SRM. My training seems to work best when I try to express, in my own actions and words (not always successfully!), the SRM, or Soto Zen teachings and practice.

In Rev Master's book, there is a chapter on The Most Excellent Mirror – Samadhi (The Mind of Zazen). In this chapter, Rev Master explains that to understand this scripture, we need to have an understanding of a teaching by Tozan known as the Five Positions or Five Ranks or Five Stages. Rev Master explains that this teaching is complex but it is summarised briefly as follows:

The first begins with our recognition of our need to train. This stage is sometimes referred to as the absolute calling to the relative.

The second step is taken when we begin to answer the call by developing a commitment to following the path. This is the relative responding to the absolute.

The third stage often comes unknowingly when our commitment grows into a certainty that compassion and wisdom lie at the heart of our being. It is known as the meeting of the absolute and the

relative.

Stage four is characterised by a deep understanding of emptiness. This stage is called the absolute alone.

Finally, there is a return to the world where the Bodhisattva ideal is understood, and the trainee now devotes their life entirely to the welfare of others.

Rev Master explains that although the five positions or stages seem like huge steps, the process is described as more like going round in a spiral where each step contains something of the other steps.

I thought I would try and find one word to explain to me each step to describe this journey in training. The words may not dovetail perfectly with Rev Master's description but they convey what I understand today. My five key words are:

1 - Ignoring

2 - Searching

3 - Training

4 - Understanding

5 - Offering

Then I thought, how can I express these words and thoughts and understandings with the use of hand mudras. I also remembered reading years ago the significance of our hands and fingers in our tradition (sorry, I cannot remember the source but I wrote in down when I was once visiting Throssel).

Left hand fingers – The fighting Asuras World, the Human World, The Animal World, The Hungry Ghosts and Hell – therefore the left hand represents the Relative, Wheel of Life (or every day mind.)

Right hand fingers – The Buddha, The

Bodhisattvas, Enlightenment – therefore the right hand represents the Absolute (or our Buddha mind).

How do I practice this mudra?

I get into my sitting position (which is with crossed legs) and start off with my left hand, palm down, on my left knee with my right hand, palm up, on my right knee. This represents my busy mind involved in everyday things but ignoring the Buddha mind which is present and available.

Inhale and reverse the position of the palms. This represents the busy mind beginning to realise that everyday things are ultimately impermanent and beginning the search for the Absolute (or Buddha mind).

Inhale and place the hands into the usual meditation posture on my lap. This represents training, such as taking the precepts, committing to the practice, attending retreats and taking refuge in the Sangha.

Inhale and pull the hands up into the Gassho position. This represents the understanding and awakening which develops with continued practice.

Inhale and place the hands on the knees with the palms upwards. This open gesture represents the wish to help others, sharing your experience and offering to do what needs to be done.

Finally, recognising that the stages can be a daily process, I inhale to place my left hand on top of my right hand in my lap. This represents sunset (death?).

Then inhale to place right hand on top of left hand in my lap. This represents sunrise (rebirth?).

Then inhale to return to stage one. I let the movements flow, using the inhalation as energy to move the hands, remaining in the mudra position for a nice relaxing exhale, then using the energy of the inhale again to move on to the next stage. Continue for several minutes, and finally let go and just sit.

Note that this mudra practice does not replace formal Zazen sitting meditation, but I find when done with the mind of awareness it can serve as a skilful means supporting both my Yoga and Soto Zen practise to calm a busy or distracted mind.

I've taught the mudras in some of my yoga classes and most students appreciate the gentleness of the mudras and the underlying message contained within the five keywords which I have suggested.

Gordon Edwards

Ref:

'Buddha Recognises Buddha' by Reverend Master Daishin Morgan



*Thank you to all the contributors to this issue of the Newsletter.
Deadline for next issue is mid-December 2013.*





- Events elsewhere in Scotland with the Prior -

September 2013

**There will be no group visit by the
Prior in September**

October

Friday 18th	Aberfeldy group evening	7.30-9pm
Saturday 19th	Dundee group morning	10am-1pm
Sunday 20th	Aberdeen Morning Retreat	10am-1pm

November

Sat 2nd—Sun 3rd	Inverness group	
Friday 22nd	Aberfeldy group evening	7.30-9pm
Saturday 23rd	Dundee group morning	10am-1pm
Sunday 24th	Aberdeen Morning Retreat	10am-1pm

December

**There will be no group visit by the
Prior in December**

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
Highland -	Calum Finlay	(01463) 870331

— 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

Are usually held on the second Saturday of each month. A short talk will be given about Buddhist practice and the Serene Reflection Meditation (Soto Zen) tradition, with meditation instruction and discussion.

Saturday 14 September, 12 October, 9 November (There will be no Introductory session in December.)

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 Master Favian Straughan*