



GAIA HOUSE

INSIGHT MEDITATION IN THE BUDDHIST TRADITION

autumn 2011  
NEWS



## Welcome...

...to Gaia House's Autumn 2011 newsletter.

At school in the 1970s and 80s I remember class discussions exploring our future, many believing that technology would bring about a revolution in society: our lives would be dominated by leisure, with career or work assuming a minor role. But western society becomes increasingly wealthy and our lives get ever busier in the pursuit of a narrow share of this wealth. The economic reality is that we follow a path of perpetual growth because we are afraid of the consequences of stepping off it. Something imaginative or creative seems to have gone astray, collectively and individually.

The pioneers who brought the dharma to the West in the early 1970s, including Christina Feldman, Christopher Titmuss, Stephen Batchelor and Martine Batchelor, introduced an opportunity to redress the imaginative and creative imbalance which had developed in secular society with the demise of organised religion. They understood the value of meditation as something with religious roots but not necessarily involving a particular belief system. They saw that it could help to develop those aspects of our minds which are not constantly caught up in material fantasies about successful futures, plans to construct those fantasies, and ensuing disappointments at how those plans never seem to become reality. They understood, in the words of Jack Kornfield, that 'everyone is a mystic, people just don't realize it', and that tools are needed to develop an awareness of the part of our existence which secular society leaves untended and which is about a truth beyond money, work, or our sense of identity. If we do

not cultivate this part of ourselves then our aspirations become limited and we are slaves to the concrete: the realm of the real withers within us.

Imagination and creativity are intrinsic to life, energy and reality. Meditation can be a way to begin to immerse ourselves more deeply in their embrace: to expand our perspective on life, to explore our uncharted selves, to find meaning or to understand its absence. Of course it can also be boring, frustrating and sometimes even physically painful. It may make you feel good. On the other hand, it may not. But it is a path of progress, certain to lead to change.

Our retreats isolate you from the demands of a busy life and put you in a beautiful, quiet and inspiring environment. We think that these are the most helpful conditions to allow you, through meditation and the help of our teachers, to develop greater sensitivity to all that is not about work, the news, facebook, email, friends, shopping, family and money, hoping to help you make your life richer. With more sense of richness we may gain the creativity and imagination which could allow us to be more content with our time and our leisure and to live our lives more fully. It is an ambitious project, but my schoolmates' predictions may yet come true.

In 2012 we are experimenting with holding off-site retreats at Seale-Hayne, a beautiful former agricultural college less than 4 miles away. We believe that this will be an excellent venue to use, allowing our programme to diversify and develop. Have a look at the 2012 programme for more information. Other exciting events in 2012 include the return of Thanissara and Kittisaro to

Gaia House and a longer Living with Illness retreat after Jean Wilkins' successful 2011 debut. Although Rob Burbea will be taking time out from teaching Group Retreats in 2012, Caroline Jones, Kirsten Kratz and Paul Burrows will be teaching a shorter version of the parallel retreat in February, while Caroline and Paul will take on Rob's August slot. At the end of June, Yanai Postelnik and Catherine McGee will teach an innovative LovingKindness and Insight retreat where attendance is possible on each of 2 parts or both. Of course the whole programme is rich: in challenges, in depth, for dipping your toes in or for complete immersion. I hope you find something in there that may help take you forward, deepen your insights and your capacity to love.

In that vein of deepening insight, this autumn newsletter reflects a diversification of meditative insight. John Teasdale, one of the forefathers of MBCT/MBSR in this country, brings a penetrating scientific analysis to bear upon the experience of mindfulness in a serious and stimulating article. On a related theme Martine Batchelor discusses likely hazards to be encountered when trying to develop meditative concentration, while John Peacock has some personal reflections about what habits might mean for us if we bring a degree of mindfulness to witness them.

From all of us at Gaia House I wish you a safe descent into autumn and winter. We look forward to welcoming you here on retreat over the next year.

**Andy Power**  
Director

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## A word from our Trustees

Sean Williams and Diana Parrat (who works locally as a counsellor) have now joined us as Trustees, and three other friends of Gaia House are working their way through the Trustee recruitment process. Douglas Stoddart will be retiring at the end of the year after seven years service to the Trust - through his chairing of the Finance Committee he has helped us to move towards a more sustainable and strategic approach to the stewardship of the Trust and our much loved but ageing building. Rob Sully is also retiring this autumn after eight years as a Trustee and serving as our Company Secretary, his skills as a solicitor have been invaluable in guiding us through the maze of charitable legislation. We wish them both well in their future endeavours. We are still hoping for applications from anyone with legal or accountancy backgrounds willing to contribute these skills to our work.

The Low/Zero Carbon Project has now moved into Phase 2, and it is expected that the new biomass boiler and solar panels will make more efficient (and hopefully more effective!) use of our existing heating and hot water systems. Sadly, exploratory drilling for a water borehole was unsuccessful in locating a suitable source. We are deeply grateful to all those whose generosity helped to give expression to the "Greening of Gaia House" campaign, and for the forbearance of those exposed to the noise and dust involved.

Even with the generous response to our extensive fundraising campaign, we had to burrow deep into our reserves to meet the cost of replacing our oil-fired boiler and Victorian pipe-work. It was in order to make sure that we could meet the necessary repairs, replacements and overhauls that crop up periodically in a building of this age, that with regret last year we were obliged to make an above-inflation increase to our charges. However, we anticipate that the accompanying changes



we have now made to widen the brief of the Retreatant Support Fund will ensure that Gaia House will continue to be accessible to all.

Since the resignation of Yanai Postelnik as our Dharma Director, we have been exploring with the Guiding Teachers how we can work collaboratively towards our objective of making the Dharma more accessible to more people, and to providing effective governance whilst allowing the work to develop and grow. The Trust and the Guiding Teachers met in April to discuss a proposal for taking this forward by means of topic groups, and this will be reviewed in April next year.

As you will no doubt read about, we are exploring off-site opportunities for Dharma study and discussion at Seale-Hayne, formerly a residential college not far from Gaia House, and we look forward to reporting back on the success of this next year.

**Trevor Dunkley**

### THE GAIA HOUSE TRUSTEES

Pictured below, left to right: Sarah Hamilton, Justin Andrews, Diana Parratt, Douglas Stoddart, Trevor Dunkley, Michael Jeffries, Sean Williams & Peter Mallard.



## Mindfulness and the Transformation of Dukkha (Suffering): A Psychological Perspective

**John Teasdale**

I was recently invited to write something for a special issue of the journal Contemporary Buddhism on mindfulness. This seemed a great opportunity to think more deeply about a question that had intrigued me for a long time: How does mindfulness contribute to the transformation of dukkha? In trying to answer that question I was led to ideas which helped me personally to think about mindfulness in new ways. Here, I would like to share the gist of some of those ideas. (The original article goes into greater detail.) The style is quite psychological, so it may not appeal to everyone. I offer it in the hope that some will find it useful.

The Buddha, in his Second Ennobling Truth, saw that the cause of *dukkha* is craving – our unquenchable thirst to have ourselves and the world be other than they are. He offered a more detailed analysis of *dukkha* in the teaching of Dependent Origination.

Dependent Origination suggests that *dukkha* is not a 'thing' with any independent lasting existence. Rather, this analysis sees the experience of *dukkha* as a reflection of certain patterns of underlying mental processing. Feedback loops within these patterns keep both the processing and the *dukkha* going. In other words, ***dukkha is actively created and re-created, moment by moment.*** Because our minds can become stuck in these self-perpetuating patterns for long periods, we tend to see *dukkha* as an enduring 'thing' or as an aspect of the self – 'me,' 'my suffering/dissatisfaction' - rather than to see it clearly for what it is – the effects of rapidly whirling patterns of mental processes that keep themselves going from one moment to the next.

This analysis has some extremely important implications if we want to find ways to end *dukkha*. It suggests that the experience of *dukkha* continues only so long as the underlying patterns of mental processes continue to whirl. This whirling, in turn, continues only so long as the conditions that support it continue to be present. If those conditions change enough, the whirling patterns will collapse, and we will no longer experience *dukkha*.

Crucially, this means ***we can bring dukkha to an end in a moment by changing the conditions that***

***support the processes that create it.*** Mindfulness offers us ways to do just that. There are three main routes for change.

The easiest route to understand is the one in which mindfulness helps us change ***what*** the mind is working on - we can intentionally refocus our attention so that, instead of focusing on content that is likely to lead to *dukkha*, we focus on content that is less likely to do so. For example, when our attention gets caught by worrisome, angry, or resentful thoughts, we can intentionally refocus our attention on the sensations in the body as the breath moves in and out. This more neutral focus will provide less 'fuel' for creating *dukkha* than the emotion-laden thoughts. By refocusing our attention, we reduce *dukkha*.

In mindfulness practice we deliberately cultivate the skills of switching the focus of attention needed in this strategy. We are probably only too aware that when we try to be mindful of the breath, our minds are almost certain to wander away into streams of thoughts, daydreaming, planning and the like. Far from being a 'problem,' such mind-wandering gives us many opportunities to recognise when the mind is lost in thought and to then intentionally redirect our attention back to the breath. In this way we improve our skills of controlling and switching our focus of attention.

We can then use these skills to get relief from *dukkha* as it arises.

Becoming more skilled in controlling our attention gives us more influence over what is on our minds. This can help us feel more effective, generally. This can also have long term effects in making us less likely to get stuck in *dukkha*.

It's not difficult to understand this first strategy for transforming *dukkha* through mindfulness training. Other, simpler, methods of attention training can also teach the same skills. But, unlike mindfulness practice, these simpler methods do not also empower us to transform *dukkha* through the second and third routes which I now want to describe.

In the second route, rather than changing **what** the mind processes, mindfulness changes **how** the mind processes the information it receives. For example, we might intentionally allow and bring a kindly interest **to** unpleasant feelings, as objects of awareness, rather than be 'lost' **within** them as we struggle to get rid of them. This would involve altering the underlying patterns of mental processes. For that reason, we might call this route changing the **shape** of the mind. I'll have more to say about this strategy shortly.

The third route through which mindfulness can transform *dukkha* is by changing **view** - the lens through which we perceive and make sense of ourselves and the world. For example, mindfulness

practice can help us see negative thoughts such as 'I'm no good' or 'the future is hopeless' for what they are - 'just thoughts' - rather than identifying with them as 'me' or seeing them as 'facts' or 'how it really is.' This third route of change is linked to the second route - **how** the mind processes experience will be affected by the **view** we take of it, which will, itself, be influenced by the 'shape' of our minds.

I'd like to focus mainly on the second route to change - the ways in which mindfulness transforms *dukkha* through changing **how** we process experience. I'll describe an account that, while rooted in contemporary psychology, aims to capture aspects of more traditional teachings.

Contemporary psychological approaches to the mind often see it through the metaphor of a computer, a device that processes information. Different kinds of information are recognised, each related to a different aspect of experience. The workings of the mind are then seen in terms of processes that transform patterns of one kind of information into patterns of another kind of information. A key concept in these approaches is **working memory**.

Working memory is a workspace in the mind where pieces of information can be held for a short time so that they can be 'worked on.' Working memory enables different pieces of information to be put together to create new patterns, which can then shape new understanding and action.

For example, the words of this sentence, processed individually, in isolation from each other, convey very limited information. But if they are all held in working memory, and viewed together, then a wider pattern of information is available that can convey much richer information.

In a similar way, working memory offers a place where patterns of information that might create *dukkha* can be brought together with patterns reflecting more wise or compassionate themes to make new patterns that no longer create *dukkha*. So, information reflecting the themes of compulsive need that drive attachments and craving could be brought together with information related to themes of 'letting go'. In this way, the mind could release itself from the grip of those patterns and *dukkha* would cease.

Often when we speak of memory, we refer to the past. So it is important to be clear that working memory is very much concerned with **present** experience. Indeed, psychologists have suggested a link between the contents of present moment conscious experience and the contents of working memory.

To understand how mindfulness fits in, we need to know that there are actually a number of distinct working memories, each specialised for handling a different kind of information. One of them, the working memory that deals with thematic meanings, is particularly important.

Thematic meanings are different from the specific, factual level kind of meanings that we are familiar with. Specific meanings are explicit, and allow us to 'know that' something is or is not the case - as with the sentence 'The cat is black.' These are the kinds of meanings most obviously involved when we 'think about' something. Thematic meanings, on the other hand, reflect more the 'deep structure' of our experience. These meanings are derived from recurring regularities across the patterns of sense data and specific meanings we encounter. They reflect core views and affective and intentional themes. Thematic meanings are implicit rather than explicit, and we know them directly, intuitively, sometimes as a 'felt sense.'

Thematic meanings are not something most of us may be familiar with. We can get a feel for them if we look at poetry. Poetry, like other art forms, can convey these kinds of implicit thematic meanings. Take a moment to read aloud these lines from the poem 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' by Keats:

Oh what can  
ail thee,  
knight-at-arms,  
Alone and palely  
loitering?  
The sedge has  
withered from  
the lake,  
And no birds sing.

For most people, reading these lines conveys a direct intuitive sense of melancholy and abandonment. We can think of this sense as our conscious awareness of the implicit meanings related to these themes communicated by the poem. The effect is very different from the factual information conveyed by the sentence: 'The man felt sad and alone.'

Specific and thematic meanings each have their own specialized working memory. These two working memories play very different roles in the creation and transformation of *dukkha*.

Working memory for **specific** meanings plays a central part in the **creation** of *dukkha* (as well as in many other more helpful mental activities). It is here where information related to **ideas** of how things actually are can be compared with information related to **ideas** of how we think we need them to be. A mismatch between these two sets of information can generate patterns of thematic meaning reflecting themes of lack, unsatisfactoriness, insatiable desire, and the like. These will create *dukkha*.

Working memory for **thematic** meanings plays a central part in the **healing** of *dukkha*. This is the only place in the mind where patterns of thematic meaning creating *dukkha* can be transformed so that they no longer lead to *dukkha*.



This is because each working memory can only handle one kind of information: working memory for specific meanings cannot deal with thematic meanings, and working memory for thematic meanings cannot deal with specific meanings. If *dukkha* is to be transformed by integrating wise and compassionate themes into the thematic meanings creating *dukkha*, then thematic working memory is the place it has to occur.

So, two very different roles for these two different working memories. Before we see how all this relates to mindfulness, we need to know one more crucial piece: the mind seems to work so that, in any moment, only one kind of working memory is involved in the overall pattern of mental processing – what I have called the ‘shape’ of the mind. For most of us, most of the time, this shape seems to be one in which working memory for specific meanings plays a leading role - we spend a lot of time ‘thinking about’ things. Working memory for thematic meanings seems to play a relatively minor role. Crucially, this means that the habitual shape of our minds is one which makes the creation of *dukkha* easy and the transformation of *dukkha* through the integration of wise and compassionate thematic meanings difficult. As a result we suffer.

The key idea I want to suggest is that **mindfulness is a way to bring thematic working memory ‘centre stage’ so that it is more involved in the way the rest of the mind works.** There are two aspects to this suggestion.

The first is that by being mindful of **any** aspect of experience, we change the prevailing ‘shape’ of the mind so that thematic working memory is more involved. In that way, we shift the mind from an overall shape which may create *dukkha* to one which is less likely to do so, and in which any *dukkha* that does arise can be transformed.

The second aspect is that when we are mindfully aware of ***dukkha*** itself, we bring the patterns of thematic meaning that are actually causing the *dukkha* right into the very place where they can be transformed – thematic working memory.

That’s the essence of the second route through which mindfulness can transform *dukkha*. We can also see the process of developing liberating insight (the third route for transforming *dukkha*) in terms of the creation of new patterns of thematic meaning related to new core views and models of self and world. Again, mindfulness offers us a way to ease the mind into a shape where the thematic information needed to form these new views can be brought to exactly the place in the mind where those new patterns can be created. They can then be stored so that they are available to reduce the chance of future *dukkha* in a lasting way.

What do we gain by the kind of psychological perspective I have described? I would suggest that this account offers ways of understanding that are both immediately relevant to our practice, and that are also relevant to long term developments in the fields of psychological and spiritual transformation. Space allows discussion of only a few of these possibilities.

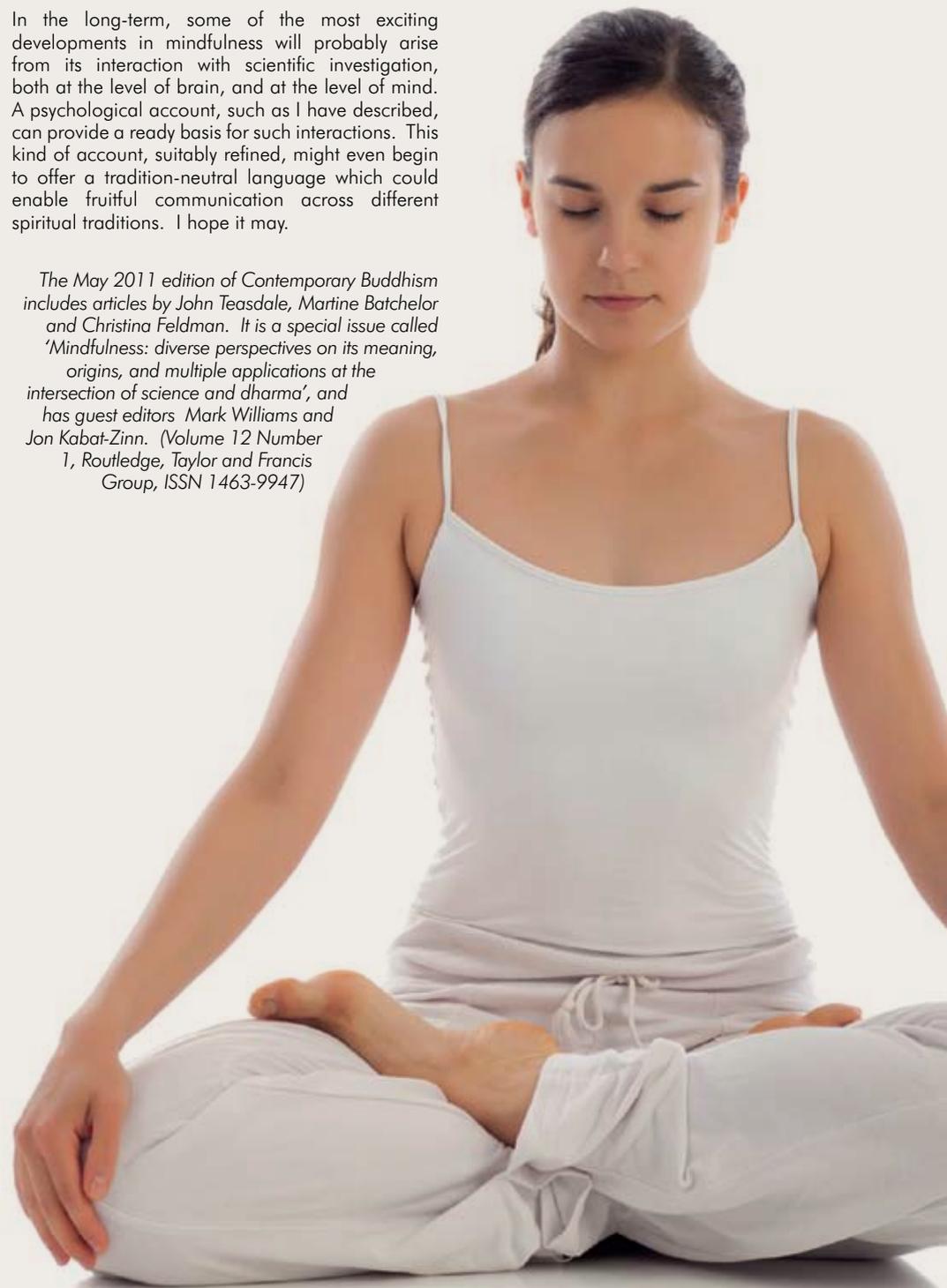
The view I have suggested makes it clear that mindfulness involves much more than paying attention, on purpose, in the moment. As Christina Feldman has written: ‘The quality of mindfulness is not a neutral or blank presence. True mindfulness is imbued with warmth, compassion, and interest.’ In the account I have presented the quality of our awareness in each moment—its warmth, compassion, and willingness to let go – reflects the intentional themes active in thematic working memory. When we intentionally cultivate wholesome qualities such as kindness, compassion, etc. we introduce into thematic working memory themes that can transform *dukkha*. It is these patterns, rather than attention alone, that ‘do the work’ of transformation.

In a similar way, patterns of information related to wise themes – seeing clinging and craving **as** *dukkha*, the impermanent **as** impermanent, and all experience **as** non-self, etc. – can contribute to the transformation of *dukkha*. But they can only do this if they are in the right form (patterns of thematic information) in the right place (thematic working memory) and at the right time (alongside the thematic patterns creating *dukkha*). **Ideas** related to these wise themes are not going to be helpful so long as they remain at the level of **specific** meanings, because these cannot enter thematic working memory. To be transformative, we need to contemplate and digest the personal relevance of these ideas in ways that will create related patterns of **thematic** meaning in working memory. There, they can shape the lens through which we are mindfully aware of the actual **experience** of *dukkha*. *Dukkha* can then be transformed.

One of the intriguing aspects of mindfulness is that mindfulness practice seems to reduce *dukkha* when we are more mindful in general, without necessarily tuning in specifically to the experience of *dukkha*. We can see these more widespread effects as the results of mindfulness creating an overall ‘shape’ of mind in which working memory for thematic meanings plays more of a role and working memory for specific meanings plays less of a role. This understanding can help motivate our on-going practice of mindfulness as a way to gently re-form the mind into a shape that makes *dukkha* less likely to arise, while making it more likely that, if *dukkha* does arise, it can be transformed.

In the long-term, some of the most exciting developments in mindfulness will probably arise from its interaction with scientific investigation, both at the level of brain, and at the level of mind. A psychological account, such as I have described, can provide a ready basis for such interactions. This kind of account, suitably refined, might even begin to offer a tradition-neutral language which could enable fruitful communication across different spiritual traditions. I hope it may.

*The May 2011 edition of Contemporary Buddhism includes articles by John Teasdale, Martine Batchelor and Christina Feldman. It is a special issue called ‘Mindfulness: diverse perspectives on its meaning, origins, and multiple applications at the intersection of science and dharma’, and has guest editors Mark Williams and Jon Kabat-Zinn. (Volume 12 Number 1, Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, ISSN 1463-9947)*



# Where would we be without our mobiles?

Dear friends,

Where would we be without our mobiles? If I go somewhere without it I feel a distinct sense of a 'something helpful' missing, and even a bit out of touch. When travelling alone, it especially feels like an essential bit of kit, a safety line. The days when we all went about our lives quite happily without one seem like the dim and distant past. Did we have a sense of lack then about something yet to be invented?

Ah, to turn off the mobile for the time one is in silence whilst on retreat. Suddenly, all this sense of 'requirement' around mobile phones drops away, and a greater sense of simplicity and quiet arises. It's so supportive for the meditation environment, and like a breath of fresh, mobile-signal-free air. When you come on retreat at Gaia House we ask people to turn mobiles off, and teachers often talk about how that supports meditation practice. Yet it doesn't always seem easy to turn it off and leave it off.

When you come on retreat at Gaia House, it may be helpful to know that you can give out the number of reception to your family and/or friends, knowing they can leave a message for you there if something important crops up. We also have an emergency mobile number people can call if something important arises and it is out-of-office time. The number is on the answer machine. With this safety net in place, you can trust that turning your mobile phone off won't compromise you. A further use for mobiles that people can find on retreat is for time-keeping; be assured that we have alarm clocks you can borrow if needed, and the bells throughout the day usually suffice for guidance about what to be doing when. So, with the practicalities of turning your phone off taken care of, all that remains is practising with feeling of being 'out of touch' for the duration of the retreat. The good news is that, by putting down our telecommunications habits, a whole new arena of being in touch can emerge. In touch with nature, ourselves, simplicity and silence.

So, we ask you to take the plunge. Go completely 'cold turkey' when on retreat. Not just switching your mobile to 'silent', or even switching it off and popping out for a quick texting session in the lanes at teatime. But go the whole hog, and leave your mobile switched off. It feels good; more like a warm and nourishing chickpea stew than cold turkey. If, as may be the case on rare occasions, you think your friends and family won't understand, please try to have a conversation with them about it before you begin your retreat. This will support you in turning your mobile off, and you may well find that people respond with curiosity and even envy at the prospect of having a good reason to go incommunicado for a while.

People often underestimate how much using the mobile even just for texting can have on one's mind and retreat experience, and how impactful it can be to others. We do our very best to create an atmosphere that will support everyone's deepening and discovery in practice, and so we really ask you to support that also, for the benefit of your own practice and that of others. You can do it, and if you haven't tried it, I think you'll like it...

**Rachel Davies** - Retreat Manager



Now since Autumn beckons, I could write about how the Gaia House trees will be giving up their foliage soon and how this all makes us think of impermanence or some such, but hey, I think we already know things are impermanent on an intellectual level, yet how much do we really embody this understanding on a visceral level? Have we really digested what we assume to know? Has knowing change changed us?

Well here at Gaia House we really get to see some change over time, this being keenly felt when it manifests in various ways including our health and wellbeing, but more particularly it is keenly felt as the changes in our own ranks. There have been many such changes to the Coordinator team over the last few months with Owen the cook, Juliet of reception, Maggie another cook, and Tony from the household department all coming to the end of their commitment here. Gerald of the reception team is also "on the launch pad", soon to return to Vienna to complete his Ph.D. on Buddhism and contemporary psychology. All of these people have not only done a fantastic job but helped maintain a harmonious community and we do think of them and wish them well.

Their replacements respectively by department are Juha from Finland, Trish, a long time resident of Virginia, US, and Pascal from France whom some of you will know, as he has been around Gaia a long time on and off, Tony who hails

## Coordinator Reflection

Don't waste time, don't waste time, It's late o'clock already here  
An oak leaf has just turned brown.

from Leeds, and Anni another Coordinator from Finland who commenced a few months back, taking over from Rae in household. The current new kid on the block is Mark whose roots are Somerset, replacing Gerald in reception.

Since the Coordinator team is quite a tight knit community we feel these changes a lot, and are keenly aware of the temporary nature of our own individual situations here too. People come from a variety of life situations, and later depart to different conditions again. So the Coordinator body seems never to be a static one but is always moving through transition.

We generally mark departures from the team with a "wake", which may or may not include some poetry reading and will probably involve a meal together.

Hopefully we create conditions for ourselves whilst we are still here for our own development. Perhaps for some of us this will involve an intensification of practice on the Eightfold Path and reflections on the highs and lows of life in a meditation centre. For myself whenever the going gets tough, I practice enquiring inwardly "who's this suffering guy?" and looking into the whole "I, me, mine" mentality that the Buddha cautions us against.

I have found myself developing some regret over whatever time I have wasted during 30 years on the Dharma path. This has come up particularly in the aftermath of my returning briefly to Bristol to spend a few hours with the corpse of a deceased Dharma

comrade, all laid out on the floor in an open coffin for his own final "wake". He had most unexpectedly died some weeks previously leading a retreat. What came up for me initially on seeing the body of this fine guy whom I had gotten to know in 2004 through fundraising activities together, was first a few seconds of fleeting rapid denial on seeing him, thoughts such as "...that isn't him" and "...didn't he just breathe out now"... came to mind. Then of course acceptance arose.

I sat there happily enough, witnessing the varied emotional responses from those assembled, with the hours passing and the evening sun morphing into darkness. Gradually a faint aroma of physical decay began touching my senses as presumably the effect of refrigeration was wearing off. And there came to me some feelings of closure and resolve which I later commented on to a friend as we left into the urban night.

It was those sentiments which now form the opening line of this article..."Don't waste time .. don't waste time."

I write this for you whether you are a Coordinator or other mortal being, in the hope you may find something herein to reflect on going forward into the autumn season. Yours from the Tool Room.

**Brian Watson**  
Maintenance Coordinator



**Pictured below from left to right:** Mark Ovland, Anni Mustonnen, Brian Watson, Emma Burleigh, Juha Pentilla, Trish King, Tony Mone & Pascal Wick.

# CONCENTRATION: inclusive or exclusive?

## Martine Batchelor

Recently I read a book called *Born on a Blue Day* about the life and experiences of an autistic savant, Daniel Tammet, who is gifted with a supportive family, a bright mind and the aspiration to learn and change. What I found interesting in this book outside of the fact that it enables one to understand what it is like to have Asperger's syndrome, is the way Daniel Tammet has a great ability to concentrate. One might say that one of his difficulties is that he has too great a capacity to concentrate for hours at a time on a minute detail in his environment. Because his ability is exclusive to anything else than that minute detail, this cuts him off from others and a more inclusive vision and encounter with the world.

In meditation we are told to concentrate, but do we do this in an inclusive or an exclusive manner? By exclusive manner, I mean concentrating on an object like the breath totally, trying to stop at the same time all thoughts, emotions, sensations or sounds. I think that it is a difficult thing to do but it is not impossible to achieve, especially on a long silent retreat. Often this seems to be the ultimate goal of meditators – total absorption. But is this advisable in terms of daily living? Would we then not cultivate being engrossed like Daniel Tammet in a certain thing to the detriment of a wider and more creative perspective? Moreover, we would experience peace, like he does, because our mind would be unwavering; but in that state we would not, like Daniel Tammet, be able to connect with anything else.

For this reason, would it not be more useful to cultivate a concentration that is inclusive of everything in the moment? Of course it might be less deep but it would compensate by making us more connected to life and its manifold activities. Moreover being aware and accepting of the unpredictability and uncertainty of life would enable us to respond more creatively to life and its unreliability. Possibly the middle way in meditation would be to focus on an object within a wide-open awareness. Focusing on the object would anchor us but keeping a wide-open awareness in the background would allow us to be more in tune with life as it unfolds.



## CULTIVATION AND EFFECT

Buddhist meditation is the cultivation of samatha (concentration) and vipassana (questioning, looking deeply) together, whatever the traditions. It can be done in many different ways. One of my Korean Zen teachers, Master Kusan, told us repeatedly to develop calmness and vividness together.

Concentration helps us to develop calmness and spaciousness; because when we focus and return again and again to the object of concentration we do not feed our mental and emotional habits. This allows them to return to their creative functioning over time. Concentration can be very focused on a small single object like the breath or wide-open like the whole moment. The point is that it makes us come back to our experience in its totality. When we come back to the breath, to the question or the sitting posture, we come back to the whole moment. Questioning or looking deeply helps us to look at our experience in a different way and enables us to feel and understand organically change and conditionality.

So meditation is about the cultivation of certain qualities, which over time generally has certain positive effects. However when we meditate, we often focus immediately on the effects we imagine or hope meditation is supposed to cultivate. Instead of cultivating, which is the point of the exercise, we are waiting to feel certain effects, evaluating if anything is happening, frustrated because nothing seems to happen, etc... But most of the time nothing happens! Just cultivate and let effects happen in their own time. Generally one will feel them anyway more in one's daily life than in the meditation itself.

## THE DAY THE VOICES STOPPED

Another book I came across which made me see some of the challenges of meditation differently is called *The Day the Voices Stopped: A Memoir of Madness and Hope*. In this book, the author Ken Steele tells us of his life with schizophrenia. The first seven chapters are really harrowing. He



tells us of all his ups and downs with his illness, the dreadful stays in mental hospitals, and the people taking advantage of him in his life outside of them. Time to time he meets good supportive people, his creative potential appears and it gives the reader a glimmer of hope, but on the main it is not a light read. But I feel that it is an important book to read to understand and see how it is for people who suffer from mental illnesses.

The 8th chapter, where Ken Steele describes what happened when his voices stopped, is extremely revealing and surprising. After taking a new medical drug for a few months, the voices suddenly disappear and are replaced by the sounds of the air conditioner. He switches off the air conditioner and is assailed by all the noises he never heard before because of the loudness of the voices in his head. At that moment he feels extremely disturbed because what he had been used to for 32 years has gone. Then he realizes that actually he had been attached to the specialness of having these voices constantly droning on. Now he feels alone and afraid. But as he slowly adapts to this new situation, he starts to experience the world in a very different way. He really hears people, sees them, greets them, etc. He truly becomes part of the world, can engage with it in a creative manner and becomes an effective mental health activist and advocate.

I was struck by the moment when the voices stopped. I wondered if something similar does not happen when we practice meditation. When we stop identifying with the mental habits that fix us and cut us off from others and the world, when we can let go, the world suddenly opens and we can see it, hear it and connect with it in a different way. The barrier of our endless

planning, comparing, story making is not in the way anymore. When we first let go, it is such a shock, we feel so different in comparison to the noisiness in our mind before. It is like one of these "before and after" pictures. But over time, as we become used to letting go, it is not such a contrast anymore. This openness and stability becomes more ordinary and our creative potential can unfold and manifest more easily.

## THE MIDDLE WAY IN MEDITATION

In the *"Numerical Discourses"*, the anthology translated by Bikkhu Bodhi, there is a sutra called *"The Refinement of the Mind (II)"*. In it the Buddha says that we have to be careful when we practise meditation "not to give exclusive attention to concentration as it could lead us into a state of indolence, not to give exclusive attention to energetic effort in case it creates restlessness and not to give exclusive attention to equanimity in case it stops us from concentrating on dissolving defilements".

This struck me because we are generally told: "Concentrate!", "Put more effort!", "Be equanimous!" on the Buddhist path. But the Buddha is telling us that our practice needs to be balanced. That putting too much emphasis on effort will make us restless is quite obvious. When we try too hard, it can become an obstacle, makes us tense, raise our energy level but in an uncontrolled way. We need to try hard but not too hard, what makes sense for our whole organism -- body, mind and heart. In Korean and Tibetan practice, there is a well-known phenomenon called 'sangee' (K) or 'lung' (T). This is over-exertion in the practice of meditation, which is said to create a terrible headache in Korean Zen, and stress with breathing in Tibetan Buddhism. So the Buddha seems to be saying: 'watch out, be enthusiastic but at the same time careful in your effort'.

As to concentration leading to indolence, this is more mystifying though it could explain in certain schools of Buddhism the recommendation to ally concentration (samatha) with experiential investigation (vipassana) and not to fall into dullness through concentrating too much. A meditator friend recently was telling me how too much concentration leads her at times to feel quite vegetative. Maybe this is what the Buddha was referring to, that if we put too much emphasis on concentration we bypass a vital and energetic aspect of the practice.

# News from the front desk

Reception is in the process of preparing for the new 2012 programme and is looking forward to receiving your bookings. The reception team always has a strong intention to make your booking experience as easy as it can be, but with less than adequate phone lines and other team duties to attend to, as well as attending to retreatants already in-house, our department can seem very busy and sometimes inaccessible if you're trying to contact us. We do ask for your patience. We have two new reception coordinators in post, Trish King and Mark Ovland, and they will do their best to process your booking and deal with any telephone or email enquiry as quickly as they can. If you leave us a telephone message, please remember to leave your contact number and full name – this may sound obvious but we often receive phone messages with no contact details, so we can't ring you back.

We've had a number of problems with cancellations recently, particularly cancellations of bookings at the Sponsor Rate. Anyone who chooses to pay this rate at the time of booking is making a very generous gift of a direct donation to the Retreatant Support Fund (RSF). If you should then cancel your booking at a later date, any refund due will be applied against the standard rate charge of the retreat. Just as a reminder, when a cancellation is received we take a small £10 admin fee, but the balance is placed in the Retreatant Support Fund which provides financial support to subsidise anyone who pays for their

retreat at the supported rate or using RSF. If you'd like more details about the RSF, please check out the information on the website or contact reception and they'll be happy to help.

2011 has been a very good year for us, with busy retreats and lots of new people coming to Gaia House for the first time. More retreats have gone to a waiting list this year than ever before. From 1 Jan 2012 we will be changing how we operate and run our waiting lists, as they can be extremely time-consuming and include many people who can no longer attend a retreat if a place becomes available. From January we will charge a £5 nominal fee to go on the waiting list. This is non-refundable but we hope it will act as a reminder to those wanting to book a place on the waitlist to keep those dates free. If you're offered a place, £5 will be applied to your booking and come off your final balance. Please remember to let us know if you can no longer come on the retreat so we can remove you from the waitlist, thus saving us valuable time should a place become available.

We very much look forward to speaking with and seeing all of you over the next year.

**Sarah Abdy** - Admin Manager

Current Reception Coordinators  
Trish King and Mark Ovland



# SANGHA NEWS

## SANGHASEVA RETREATS

**2 Dec 2011- 2 Jan 2012**

### The Power of Love, Anandwan leprosy community, India

Living and working in a vibrant community of the abled-disabled while exploring our own hearts and what connects us to each other. Facilitated by Nathan Glyde and Zohar Lavie

**14 Mar – 3 Apr 2012**

### Dharmalaya Sustainable Living Work Retreat, Himalayan foothills, Himachal Pradesh, India

Using ecological building and sustainable farming to create a gentle and sensitive way of being in the world. Facilitated by Nathan Glyde and Zohar Lavie

For more information visit [www.sanghaseva.org](http://www.sanghaseva.org)

**Fri 2 – Sun 4 Dec 2011**

### Insight Meditation Retreat at Gayles in the South Downs, with Yanai Postelnik.

An opportunity to spend the weekend in contemplative silence, with full instructions for Insight Meditation and opportunities to discuss your practice with the teacher. Suitable for beginners and experienced meditators. Gayles retreat is a small centre situated in beautiful countryside on the South Downs near Eastbourne, and easy to reach from London. Places are limited so early booking is recommended.

For further information / booking, contact Roz Robinson Tel: 07721 023845 or 07969 749829  
[www.retreattogayles.co.uk](http://www.retreattogayles.co.uk)

**Fri 6 – Mon 9 Apr 2012  
Easter Weekend**

### Dartmoor Walking and Meditation Retreat with Yanai Postelnik.

Camping at Gidleigh Village Hall,  
Chagford South Devon,

This retreat will be a special opportunity to cultivate mindfulness and practice the Dharma, while exploring the beauty and wilderness of Dartmoor. Following in the tradition of the Buddha, we will support our hearts to deepen in wisdom and compassion, while walking together in a range of landscapes, sitting in meditation, and spending time around the campfire. Gidleigh Village Hall provides an ideal base, with ample secluded camping space, a spacious hall with heating, toilets, a shower and kitchen.

Further information / booking:  
Contact Faith: 07952 157585  
Email: [faithburch@hotmail.com](mailto:faithburch@hotmail.com)

### The Mansion Sitting Group, Totnes, Devon

This group has been meeting every Thursday at 7:30pm at The Mansion in Totnes. It is sangha led, teachers visiting on most evenings. The group organises sangha-building events such as meditation days, walks and other social events. If interested please contact Andrew at [bodatcha@yahoo.com](mailto:bodatcha@yahoo.com) or just come along.

There is a plan to repeat a series of evenings in Newton Abbot in spring 2012, offering an introduction to Insight Meditation. The course will run over six weeks on Tuesday evenings and will be led by Jenny Wilks and Kirsten Kratz, dates and venue to be publicised closer to the event. Contact Gaia House Reception [info@gaiahouse.co.uk](mailto:info@gaiahouse.co.uk) 01626 333613

In August, 24 people from the local Insight Meditation groups in Totnes and Newton Abbot gathered for a day retreat at Gaia House led by Kirsten Kratz and Jenny Wilks, and they hope to offer more of these in the future.

# Teacher in focus – Christina Feldman

*Asking Christina Feldman about the beginnings of her time as a meditator and teacher, she described her early experiences and some of what she has learnt and taken forward from those days*

Arriving in India in 1970 I soon found myself immersed in study with a Tibetan teacher, Geshe Rapden, a much respected lama. Arriving in Dharamsala in the foothills of the Himalayas in a community of Tibetan refugees, I found myself profoundly touched by the poise and happiness of this group of people who had so recently been through the trauma of their exodus from Tibetan. I was also somewhat bewildered by their capacity to embody compassion and forgiveness rather than following the avenues of rage or hatred. Beginning to study in the Tibetan tradition it became clear to me that what was being embodied was the heart of the Buddha's teaching: wisdom and compassion. For myself there was an almost immediate connection with the elegance of the teaching and the possibilities it offered for profound transformation.

I spent several years in the village, meeting some of the current Gaia House teachers who were equally engaged in exploring the path. The path I began as a teenager has in truth shaped the rest of my life. During that time in India, I also began to practice insight meditation with Munindra and Goenka, influences in how I now find myself teaching.

In the early 1970s in India I encountered Christopher Titmuss, a monk at that time, who was teaching insight meditation to small groups of people. For several months a community established itself around him. Living there for several months, quite naturally it happened that people began to ask me questions about the path and it seemed at times found some benefit in the answers I was able to offer. Personally I never had any ambition to be a meditation teacher – like many things in life, one thing simply led to another and I accepted an invitation to teach in Bodhgaya and then Australia.

I do not now think of myself as being a meditation teacher. I feel instead deeply privileged to be able to live as a dharma teacher. The Buddha in my understanding, did not just teach people how to meditate – but instead taught the cultivation of an awakened life in which no area of our lives is exempt from wise intention, kindness and investigation. What happens off the cushion is as equally important as



what happens on the cushion. Much of my teaching takes place in the context of silent meditation retreats, but I trust that I continually convey the message that what happens there is not just a practice but a path of liberation that is intended not only to transform the shape of our minds but the shape of our lives.

The Buddha in my understanding was a radical – challenging the power of greed, hatred and delusion and all the ways they manifested in his world during his life. This message I feel is as central to our world today as it was 2600 years ago. I am constantly inspired in teaching to see the remarkable shifts people can make in their hearts and in their understanding in just a few days on a retreat. Yet retreats are only a beginning of exploring what it means to embody the kindness, insight and compassion in the whole of their lives. I have been involved over the years in helping to establish and sustain several dharma centres including Gaia House – and see the ways in which they have become centres of refuge, silence and peace. They are also places where people have the opportunity to explore the same teachings of freedom that have been explored by people over centuries. There is a certain timelessness in human beings' capacity to experience anguish and struggle. There is also a timelessness to a path and teaching that shows the ways to bring anguish and struggle to an end.

The dharma continues to evolve in our culture – we see children and young people on retreats designed for them. We see the applications of this path and practice developing in schools, in mental health fields, in prisons, in hospitals. Networks of sitting groups have emerged – there is a thirst for understanding, for peace for liberation. It seems the path of awakening is deeply alive.

## FOCUS ON RETREATS...

### Meditation Day at Gaia House

Caroline Jones

**Wed 14th December 2011**

Retreat Code:

Cost: £25

Meditation days are an opportunity to spend a day in silence with sustained meditation practice, instruction and a Dharma talk. Newcomers are welcome and full instructions will be given for those new to meditation. Lunch will also be provided.

Caroline Jones has been practising meditation since 1989. She started teaching in 2006, and now teaches at Gaia House and internationally. She has also covered periods at Gaia House as resident teacher.

### Embodied Presence – Meditative Practice as Nourishment for Your Being

Leela Sarti

**Thurs 1st – Sun 4th Dec 2011**

Retreat Code: 11169

Cost: £149 (£126) £178

The meditative practice of immediate, embodied awareness and heart-centred curiosity about our being and the moment-to-moment changing flow of life's experiences, weaves a sacred container for our life. Centred in a living field of awakening and stillness, grounded in our body, mind and five senses, we find nourishment and support for the deepening of our understanding, and develop our capacity for openhearted, skilful living. Through meditative sitting and walking practices, along with Dharma talks, discussions and interviews, we will explore the depth of the Buddha's teaching on living a wise and compassionate life.

### Ethical Grounding, Meditative Calm and Liberating Insight – The Threefold Way

Jenny Wilkes and Chris Cullen

**Fri 16th – Sun 18th Dec 2011**

Retreat Code: 11171

Cost: £112 (£95) £135

The Buddha's path of Awakening integrates ethics, meditation and insight. This weekend provides a chance to explore how together these enable us to see ourselves and the world with greater clarity, to open our hearts, and to be released from limiting views and habits that lead to suffering. There will be silent sitting and walking meditation, and opportunities to discuss our experience of the practices.

### Major Life Change

Alan Lewis

**Fri 27th – Sun 29th Jan 2012**

Retreat Code: 12131

Cost: £118 (£100) £141

With Buddhist teachings we can learn to live more wisely with change, but with major life change, we experience major disruptions and challenges – affecting our deepest assumptions about who we are. In this retreat we will explore some of these issues, using meditation, silent reflection and group discussion.

### Young Person's Retreat – Seeing Clearly and Acting Wisely (Ages 16 – 25)

Caroline Jones and Jake Dartington

**Fri 17th – Sun 19th Feb 2012**

Retreat Code: 12134

Cost: £118 (£100) £141

This retreat welcomes young people to explore meditation and the Buddha's teaching of the path of liberation. Through sitting and walking meditation, we will explore practical ways to find deeper freedom in our lives and investigate how wise understanding expresses itself in a kind and compassionate way of being.

## Some reflections on habits

Habits are never good, and thus a substitution of bad habits by good ones is no solution. Habits are repeated actions, actions going in grooves, which seemingly make life so much easier and safer. One does not have to learn to play a musical instrument when it emanates from a CD or tape player; one does not have to steer a train when it is running on rails; one does not have to make long and complicated calculations when there is a computer handy to do the job much more efficiently.

Nevertheless, there is more to a habit than sheer ease, comfort, or laziness. There is the sense of security in following lines of routine, following millions of others and engaging in the endless rituals that form the basis for most religious observance.

There are, however, repeated actions that necessarily form part of the rhythm of daily life, both at home and at work, and without which much social organisation would grind to a halt. But if we look closely at the actions of the individual there are also actions, initially controlled and intended, which have become habits without our knowing it, nervous habits which seem to have become characteristics of our 'identity', or 'personality'.

Thus the question arises: Why did I develop a habit? It does not matter what the habit is: biting one's nails, smoking, drinking to excess, eating with my mouth open, fiddling with my fingers, and a myriad of nervous actions and reactions which have no meaning and yet have become habits, to which specialists have given beautiful Greek names. The specialist, or therapist will analyse the habit and perhaps discover a hidden source or factor related to our childhood. But these are interpretations, whereas I want to understand what a habit, any habit, reveals; what it is and not where it comes from.

Now, if we do not seek an interpretation or an explanation of the past, there can be a direct observation without judgement, which is the immediate reaction in awareness, in the awareness of the reaction. Then it may be observed that a certain action has become a habit, because I have become dependent on that action. This dependence is now a mechanical or automatic reaction, a groove, in which my engine has to run, if it wants to run smoothly. This means that neither the movement of the engine, of thought, of action etc., is important, nor the means by which I make it move, as long as it runs smoothly, as long as it relaxes my nerves, as long as it gives me satisfaction and makes me feel, whether this be in the habit of a smoke, a drink, a withdrawal in concentration, or engaging in some

communal religious activity, etc. And I continue that habit, because it keeps me in good company. I want that, I need that, because I am afraid to be alone, to be myself. Do I want to know myself? Perhaps I could learn from my habits. Much of mindfulness meditation is simply that, getting to know our habits.

Habits provide security. Even though habits are binding, one prefers the security of them, rather than the freedom of insecurity. And yet, habits are destructive to real living, because they destroy sensitivity, they prevent awareness; they cause the panic of fear in the freedom of insecurity and independence. Thus, the mind does not want to be free; it wants to be dependent so as to be secure. But there is no security in impermanence; there is only the desire for security, for only then can there be the continuance of hope for a better and idealised living.

Habits are therefore a form of escape, in which the mind can go to sleep and need not be alert all the time. But, without awareness of what is, of my reaction to what is, awareness of what this 'I' is apart from those reactions and habits, there is only a denial of living, a denial of sensitivity, of affection and of love. Habit is thus a denial of love and ultimately of life. Yet, one is afraid to abandon one's habits, for they are one's dress and one's make-up. Without our habits and memories, our hopes and our fears, our reactions to desire, which are the conditioning of the mind, which can produce only thoughts, our habit forming mental drugs – without all this there is nothing to cling to.

But, when there is nothing to cling to there is a direct experiencing, unconditioned by habits, and independent of memories. However, in that total freedom from fear, there is an immediate response of insight which is always new, not hemmed in by routine, nor regulated by a mere sense of duty, not propelled by undisclosed motives, but sensitive and fully alert in understanding - truly alive, aware and awake.

**John Peacock**



## Insight Talks

Gaia House maintains a vast library of recorded Dharma talks by Gaia House teachers. You can now download any of the talks given at Gaia House since Spring 2006 via our website, in return for a donation.

Simply click on Resources, Dharma Talks, Insight Online, and then Dharma Seed, and search for our talks by Retreat Centre and date of retreat, or by teacher. Dharma Seed are kindly hosting our talks on their server, along with talks from many other retreat centres around the world. Talks from any given retreat will be available online within a maximum of five weeks after the retreat has ended.

The donations that you offer are what makes this service possible, and so are very gratefully received. The recommended donation is £2.00 per talk, and you can donate by going to the Gaia House website and click on payments and donations or send us a cheque payable to Gaia House Trust, with a note saying that it is a donation for dharma talks.

If you are not able to access the internet, then you can order recordings of talks in audio CD format or as MP3 files on a CD. For further information the on availability and costs of talks, contact Faith Burch at [insight.talks@gaiahouse.co.uk](mailto:insight.talks@gaiahouse.co.uk).

There are some big changes happening in the talks library at Gaia House next year. The thousands of CD's and tapes in our library take up a lot of space, have a limited shelf life and can easily get damaged or lost. Soon they will all be gone, and instead retreatants will be able to listen to talks by downloading them from a small computer onto personal MP3 players. It's quite a trip keeping up with all of the fast changing technological innovations that are happening in the world of sound, but if it serves to make the dharma more easily available to more people, we think it's a good thing!

If you would like to support us by donating an MP3 player (which would be used by people listening to the Dharma while on Personal Retreat at Gaia House) then please send it to us well packaged, with an accompanying letter. All offerings would be gratefully received!



## Kirsten Kratz joins the community of Insight Meditation teachers.

Over the last 4 years, Kirsten has been working closely with me, teaching on retreats together, and also with other teachers in the UK and internationally.

Having completed her time in training, I am very happy to confirm that she is authorised to share the dharma as a Teacher in the Insight Meditation tradition, and I wish her very well in the role.

**Yanai Postelnik**

Guiding Teacher Council member.

# One Day Retreat Information 2011/12

## Brighton

21 – 22 Jan Ken Jones  
14 Apr Yanai Postelnik  
27 May Bhante Bodhidhamma  
Cost: This day retreat is offered on the traditional Buddhist principle of 'dana'.

For information and registration:  
[www.bodhigarden.org](http://www.bodhigarden.org)  
Email: [info@bodhigarden.org](mailto:info@bodhigarden.org)

## Bristol

21 Jan Rob Burbea  
25 Feb Alan Lewis  
28 Apr Brad Richecoeur  
8 Sep Caroline Jones  
3 Nov Christina Feldman  
1 Dec Bhante Bodhidhamma  
For more information and to book day retreats visit  
<http://www.bristolmeditation.org.uk/retreats.htm>.

Email: [bristoldayretreats@gmail.com](mailto:bristoldayretreats@gmail.com)

## Oxford

11 Feb Catherine McGee  
24 Mar Norman Feldman  
28 Apr Jake Dartington  
26 May Chris Cullen  
Venue: Headington Parish Hall  
Time: 10am–5pm, registration from 9.15am  
Cost: £10 (£5 concessions)  
Contact: see [www.oxfordgaiahouseretreats.co.uk](http://www.oxfordgaiahouseretreats.co.uk) (for booking form, information about the retreats, contacts for sitting groups).

For other enquiries, ring Brigid or David on 01608 811940

## Sheffield

27 Nov Sangha Day  
28 -29 Jan Yanai Postelnik  
3 - 4 Mar Rob Burbea  
6 - 8 Jul Jake Dartington (residential retreat)  
[www.sheffieldinsightmeditation.org.uk](http://www.sheffieldinsightmeditation.org.uk)  
[rwolton@phonecoop.coop](mailto:rwolton@phonecoop.coop)  
01433 631350

## Cambridge

19 Nov Christina Feldman  
21 Jan Catherine McGee  
17 Mar Rob Burbea  
12 May Martine Batchelor  
26 May Bhante Bodhidhamma  
Venue: Friends Meeting House, 12, Jesus Lane Cambridge  
Time: 10am - 5pm, registration 9.30 am  
Cost: £8 in advance/ £10 on the day + teacher dana

Concessions: students, unwaged, retired £5  
Contact: Advance booking by cheque for £8, payable to DeMarrais/Retreats, to Liz DeMarrais, 9 George Street, Cambridge CB4 1AL

Further info: May 26th retreat  
tel. 01353 659 082  
All other retreats  
tel. 01223 460 966

# London Insight Meditation

22 Jan Catherine McGee  
King Alfred's School  
28 Jan Day for sitting group co-ordinators  
with the London Insight team  
St Ethelburga's Centre  
19 Feb Martin Aylward  
King Alfred's School  
27 Feb Paul Burrows  
18 Mar Maura Sills  
King Alfred's School  
24-30 Mar Mar Martin Aylward  
Work Sex Money Dharma: week-long course  
Venue TBC  
15 Apr Yanai Postelnik  
King Alfred's School  
13 May Martine Batchelor  
King Alfred's School  
20 May Stephen Batchelor and Don Cupitt –  
A debate  
26 May Locana - focussing workshop  
23/24 Jun Akincano  
King Alfred's School

For further details see [www.londoninsight.org](http://www.londoninsight.org)

More events are added all the time. Please register on our website to receive email updates on all our events.

**Day retreats** mostly take place at King Alfred's School, a lovely venue in Golders Green where we have the use of the grounds for walking meditation as well as a spacious hall for sitting. It is easily accessible from central London (15 minutes by tube from Euston). Days run from 10am to 4.30pm, with registration from 9.30. Please bring a contribution to a shared vegetarian lunch (and look out for email updates notifying you of any variations to this arrangement).

The **day for sitting group co-ordinators** (28 Jan) will be our second annual day of discussion, reflection and meditation for anyone involved in running a sitting group in or around London. We will be sharing ideas for making our groups as inspiring and fulfilling as we can.

**Work Sex Money Dharma** (24-30 March) is an innovative week-long course that Martin Aylward will be teaching in London for the third time. Consisting of two day-long sessions at the weekend plus evening meetings over the following 5 days, it integrates intensive practice with everyday life.

**Stephen Batchelor** (20th May) will take part in

an afternoon of dialogue with the radical Christian theologian Don Cupitt. Don has been a major influence on Stephen's thinking.

**Focussing workshop** (27 May) will be led by Locana, who has taught nonviolent communication for us in previous years. It is a western technique of awareness, enquiry and transformation and is a worthwhile adjunct to insight meditation.

Prices for events are kept as low as possible: for example day retreats in 2011 cost £14 when booked in advance. Concessions are available, and we do not exclude anyone because of inability to pay. Teachers receive only expenses from us, but at our events you are warmly invited to offer them dana (a voluntary contribution to their livelihood).

We offer personal interviews with teachers from Gaia House and elsewhere about once a month: register on our website to receive email updates on these and all other events.

There is a network of sitting groups in and around London affiliated with us, including study groups with particular themes, such as our Insightful Aging group. Please see [www.londoninsight.org/community/sitting-groups](http://www.londoninsight.org/community/sitting-groups) for more details.

London Insight is run by a team of volunteers with one part-time paid administrator. We are committed practitioners of insight meditation and we consult regularly with teachers from Gaia House to ensure that the way we work is in harmony with the ethos of the tradition. We hope to have become a registered charity by the beginning of 2012.

We actively support the Khuphuka Project in South Africa and are planning to increase our range of socially engaged work in 2012. We aim to offer an increasingly varied programme of events relevant to people of all backgrounds, and to work towards greater social and environmental responsibility in the way we operate.

## Contact details

Additional Sitting Groups in London can be found on the London Insight website at <http://www.londoninsight.org/community/sitting-groups/>

## General enquiries:

[enquiries@londoninsight.org](mailto:enquiries@londoninsight.org)  
07954 472771  
[www.londoninsight.org](http://www.londoninsight.org)  
Facebook: [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)  
Twitter: @londoninsight

# UK Sitting Groups

This is the latest UK sitting groups register. If your name and details are not featured here and you run a sitting group in the UK, please do let us know and we can add you to this feature of the newsletter. Please keep us up to date with your plans so that we can ensure we always publish the most up to date information.

Keep in touch via email on [admin@gaiahouse.co.uk](mailto:admin@gaiahouse.co.uk).

## AVON & SOMERSET

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BRISTOL [www.bristolchan.co.uk](http://www.bristolchan.co.uk)  
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# OVERSEAS Sitting Groups

If you run a group outside the UK and wish to feature in the overseas sitting groups register, please email [admin@gaiahouse.co.uk](mailto:admin@gaiahouse.co.uk) for more information on how to feature in our bi-annual newsletters.

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# In fond memory of John Hurrell Crook

This Koan has been printed in fond memory of John Hurrell Crook, who recently passed away. John taught many retreats at Gaia House over the years. The Koan is taken from his book 'The Koans of Layman John', and has been re-printed with the kind permission of his son.

One has to say farewell somewhere,  
so here's a final verse to say farewell:

*My name is No-eye  
Hole in the skull  
Servant of silence  
Walking.  
Not I, this skull alone  
Moves across this dusty plain.  
Mountains rise, valleys  
Cool winds and waters fall.  
Hot rocks glow on the valley floor.  
Through this skull  
The world moves  
Like rivers from the mountain  
Snow waters from high ice  
Nothing in the way.\**

*There is no path,  
No need for dependency,  
Only time and the pattern of time unfolding.  
In letting the winds of time  
Blow this old corpse along  
The everyday becomes indeed  
The eternal.*

*Nothing matters  
And everything must go  
Yet, love is having  
the heart touched  
In the valleys of suffering.*

*Peace, quiet joy,  
Servants of Silence.  
Ordinary grey rocks  
of the mountain  
In whom deep waters run  
On whom by night the moon  
By day the sun.*

*Friday, May 1, 2009*

*\* Written in Zangskar, Ladakh.*

