



GAIA HOUSE

INSIGHT MEDITATION IN THE BUDDHIST TRADITION

autumn 2013
NEWS



Welcome

By the time this Newsletter is printed, autumn will be well under way with an abundance of leaves to be raked up from the front lawn during the morning work periods. Nature's generosity to be turned into compost for our garden which has thrived during the summer months. The quality and quantity of vegetables from the kitchen garden is one example of how much the hard work and generosity of our coordinators and volunteers contributes to everyone's well-being whilst staying here.

One aspect of Gaia House that could not exist without the generosity of our retreatants is the Retreat Support Fund. Applications to the Fund have increased significantly over the past couple of years and we depend on Dana to be able to meet those requests. We would like to say a special 'thank you' to the retreatant who shaved her head as a fundraising exercise and made a significant contribution to the fund.

This summer has been a particularly busy one with a packed group retreat programme including a family retreat described as 'one of the best' by more than one participant. The family retreat is always popular but does make significant demands on teachers, coordinators, volunteers and staff alike. We have been looking at creative ideas for its future but sadly we have decided not to include a family retreat in our 2014 Programme with the intention of running it again in 2015.

With the help of our Programme Advisory Group, we have put together a varied programme of group retreats for 2014. We have also been working closely with the Trust looking at ways of improving what we already do and at expanding our activities into Outreach areas such as the popular meditation classes that we have been putting on in our local town, Newton Abbot.



Over the coming months our attention and energy will be occupied with forward planning, practical projects already underway including improving the fabric of the house and maintaining our Biorock waste system, Biomass boiler and systems to support everyone's stay in a simple yet efficient way.

For both of us, as Co-Directors, the time since the last Newsletter went out has been productive and enjoyable as we have developed ways of working together and got to know each other as friends. The experience of meeting so many people that contribute in a selfless way is inspirational. It is a joy and privilege to be here and serve the Dharma in this way.

Diana Parratt & Siggie Street,
Co-Directors

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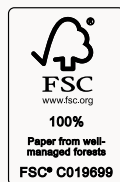
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A word from our trustees

Gaia House is much in demand! Or to be more precise what is offered at Gaia House is more sought after than ever before. Retreats book up months in advance and we often have a waiting list. We can't squeeze any more retreats in to the programme, nor any more retreatants in to the House. This is all good news, except that we want to make the teaching more accessible and take it further for those who want to pursue this path. The Trust and Teachers have been looking strategically at what we can do over the next five years (and beyond) to broaden our delivery and to this end we have come up with an outline strategic plan.

We are planning to:

- develop a study programme to complement the retreat programme, exploring how and why the Buddha's teachings are relevant in a largely secular contemporary society
- develop online courses and teaching support via the web
- provide more support for Sitting Groups and those that lead them
- run or support retreats in cities and towns in other parts of the country
- make changes to the house to improve the retreat experience and increase the provision of more single rooms.

These are some of the ways that we would like to develop. It will require investment from Gaia House reserves, a concerted fund raising campaign and sound long-term financial planning to underpin our current operation; at the moment the cost of retreats is partly subsidised by donations made to Gaia House and this is not sustainable in the long term. We have begun to strengthen



the Trust Board, and we are grateful to those who have offered their skills and experience in service. We shall also be adding a ninth volunteer co-ordinator to reduce workload pressure arising from being at full capacity most of the time. This will mean a slightly higher than inflation cost to the group retreat programme; however, we shall continue to offer the Retreatant Support Fund to ensure that retreats remain affordable for those on low incomes. We shall compliment this with specific supported retreats to improve the accessibility of the teachings for particular groups in the community.

The development plans for Gaia House are exciting and a response to the growing interest in meditation and the Dharma in more and more people's lives. We hope to report on progress regularly in the months and years ahead.

Michael Jefferies, Chair of the Trustees

GIFT TOKENS

Would you like to offer
the 'gift of Dharma'
to someone in your life?

Contact reception to order
personalised gift tokens;
info@gaiahouse.co.uk /
01626 333613

A YOGI PERSPECTIVE

LIVING WITH ILLNESS AND LOSS RETREAT

Barbara Staneland

I hope there will be a lot more of these retreats to help the many many people out there who are also struggling with pain, illness and loss.

A friend recommended this retreat to me but at first I resisted, as I have been working hard for several years on being positive thinking towards my many health problems (almost to the point of being in denial of them!) and I thought I did not want to be with a group of people who focused on their illnesses. Also, I used to find this depressing.

I have spent an absolute fortune altogether over the last 29 years on alternative therapies to find relief from my suffering but although they have helped, I could find no cure. However, I have never given up hope. The day my friend suggested the Living with Illness and Loss retreat to me I thought I really truly had found the root cause of my illness and spent ages telling him about this, feeling so sure that I would be well in no time that there was no need for me to be on retreat with a lot of ill people.

However, on second thoughts, I realised that even if (or should I say when) I regain good health in the future, I have to accept my state of health as it is at the moment.

So I decided to go on the retreat.

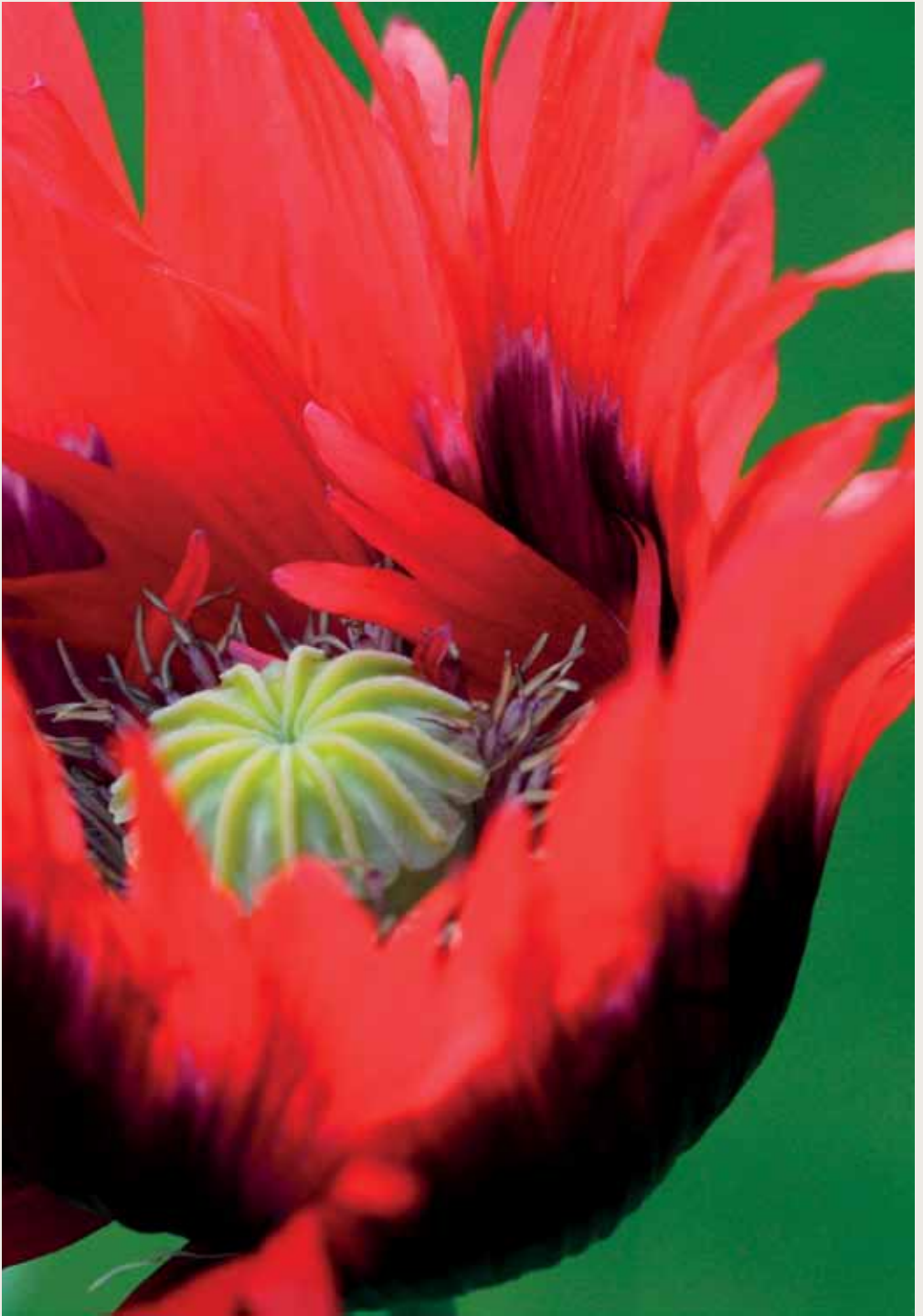
Well, am I glad that I did!! I learnt so much from it.

I particularly appreciated the kindly air of acceptance towards our limitations. Although it was a structured retreat (which I initially was a bit worried about), I felt no pressure and no guilt for not being able to do what my energy levels did not permit. Even during the sessions

in the meditation room, we were continually encouraged to make ourselves comfortable. As most of us suffer a lot of physical pain, this made the retreat much more enjoyable. I either laid flat on the floor or with my knees bent, or kept sitting or kneeling in different positions to reduce the aching in my muscles, and for the first time in my life I did not feel uncomfortable doing this amidst other people, as we were all in the same boat! I really enjoyed the sessions where we interacted with each other, and I know everyone really appreciated being truly listened to. I think the retreat deepened our sense of compassion for each other, and it taught me compassion for myself and to accept my limitations and to be kind and caring to myself. The retreat helped me cultivate a more loving attitude towards myself, and because of that I felt a deep love for everyone else.

The retreat has taught me patience (or renewed the patience I always had when I was younger), so I am not in such a hurry to find a 'cure' now, as I can accept the way I am and still feel joy and peace, knowing everything is just as it is meant to be. Having that attitude has totally changed my life!

I hope there will be a lot more of these retreats to help the many many people out there who are also struggling with pain, illness and loss. I, for one, would highly recommend it to anyone I come across who is suffering in this way.





INSIGHT AND EMBODIMENT

Christina Feldman

The essence of the Buddha's teaching is to offer a comprehensive path of awakening. Integrity provides the fertile ground for the deepening of insight that in turn is embodied in unshakeable kindness and compassion. It is a path that lays great emphasis upon inner development – refining our capacities for mindfulness, investigation, serenity and inner stillness, knowing that to change the shape of our lives and world we are asked to change the shape of our mind/heart. Releasing our minds from the compulsions of greed, hatred and confusion is simultaneously to know the flowering of kindness, compassion, joy and equanimity.

It is a challenging path as mindfulness reveals to us the extent that habit patterns and reactivity can govern our lives, our relationships and the choices we make. We are asked to learn what it means to walk new pathways of responsiveness, wakefulness and insight. Experientially we discover what perpetuates struggle, fear and confusion and what leads to the end of anguish, dissociation and isolation. As wakefulness deepens we begin to emerge from the contraction of self-absorption to live a life as a conscious participant in the world we are part of. The circle of our care and concerns widens in the deepening understanding of what it means to live a life guided by insight and compassion.

Interwoven with the path of inner development is the path of embodiment, the ways in which understanding is applied and lived in all the ways we engage with life. The path of awakening has never been a disengaged

path abstracted from the reality of a world that is pervaded with the suffering borne of greed, hatred and delusion. With our thoughts, words, acts and choices we leave a footprint upon the world. A path committed to the end of suffering, division and fear asks us to consciously explore the footprint we leave. Studying and practicing the Buddha's teaching it is evident it is not a prescriptive path permeated with judgments of good, bad, right and wrong. The language we encounter is a language of investigation; understanding for ourselves what is skilful and unskilful, wholesome and unwholesome, what leads to the perpetuation of suffering and to its end.

Embodiment is not always a comfortable word to embrace. Discomfort with the familiar and the habitual is an integral part of learning to live more wakefully and wisely. Discomfort is an invitation to investigate the gaps that can exist between our aspirations and most deeply held values and the ways that we act, speak and think. There is a tension in waking up, in bringing about inner and outer transformation. This was as true 2500 years ago in the time of the Buddha as it is today. It is easier to idealize kindness and compassion than to have our lives guided by these qualities. Inwardly we can be deeply committed to sensitivity, integrity, yet find those intentions hijacked by familiar habit patterns of fear, heedlessness and contractedness. It is easy to be judgmental of the gaps between our ideals and actualities, yet the patterns of self-condemnation only add an additional layer of suffering.



The tension between our aspirations and habits is not in itself a negative tension. This is where we practice, shine the light of mindfulness and investigation – it can be a creative tension. The Buddha firmly placed the path of awakening in the classroom of our lives. A dedicated meditative practice includes an awareness of wise speech, wise action, wise effort and wise intention – these are our bridges to the world around us. In a time when our world and the well-being of many in it is endangered by economic and environmental collapse, by racism and

injustice, by poverty and war it is tempting to retreat into a fearful self-protection. The capacity of human beings to inflict untold misery upon one another is as old as the history of humanity. Despair, shame, anger do little to bring about change. There are no hierarchies in suffering nor are there hierarchies in compassion. An embodied life, committed to wakefulness and compassion, cares both inwardly and outwardly for the well-being of all, knowing how inter-dependent well-being, peace and freedom is.



IT IS HERE WE AWAKEN

Catherine McGee

“In this way one abides contemplating the body as a body internally, externally, and both internally and externally.” From the Satipatthana Sutta, the Foundations of Mindfulness teaching of the Buddha.

Practicing the first foundation of mindfulness, knowing body as body, internally and externally, we can come to know we are of this earth. When we sit and feel the solidity of our bones, the firmness of the flesh, the density and weightiness of our human presence, we can come to know what it is to sit ‘as earth sitting on earth’. This is part of knowing our basic elemental nature and something we share with everyone and everything. As we come more into body, we gain direct insight that our intimacy with earth is more primary than anything our mind can tell us. This intimacy is breathtakingly immediate; unmediated by anything. It is an undeniable aspect of being human. We are literally ‘in our element’ as embodied creatures. Whether we are happy about this or not is another story. But for now, this earthly body IS home base.

It takes a path of practice for many of us to heal the ways we have lost contact with our body and taken refuge in abstractions. Abstracting ourselves as separate beings is painful and leads to more suffering; personal; national; global. When we see a thing as separate we come out of real relationship with it, whether it be our body, other bodies or the great body of this earth. Then we treat it in ways distorted by delusion.

We abstract into separation because it is not always easy to tolerate the sensitivity of our animal body, impinged upon by contact (sight, sound, smell, taste, touch and the mind) and comfortable only within a narrow range of temperatures and other conditions, and subject to insecurity, sickness and death.

Healing this separation, and coming into a wise relationship with body is imperative for waking up and responding to the reality of the times we live in. And through practice we can realize that this body is not a separate stand alone phenomena. That view is a mind made story.

Through the body we cultivate the stable presence of Samadhi, a ground from which to see deeply and not be unseated by our programming. With body as a firm basis we can begin to heal the duality of being lost in mind made worlds, and come into the profound and sensitive immediacy of the human realm.

It is here, not someplace else that we can sense directly that we are made from the earth, the fertile material substance - the humus. This is where our humanness is grounded and this is the arena where we can act with appropriate humility: as the conceit of believing ourselves as separate softens, we find that everyone else is here with us too. We are, quite simply, all in this together.

And it is here in this body that we can make our insights real, live them through the actions of our body speech and mind. We may have many realizations, but only through action do they become transformative.

It is here, on this earth, that we take our place as human beings - these marvelous human animals that can respond and act: who can join hands, who can stand up for what is wholesome, who can speak up for those yet to be born, who can say 'no' when justice and respect for life is undermined.

And it is here where we practice and engage with the places that scare us and which can ultimately ennoble us, both internally and externally.

And through love and wisdom it is we who have the capacity to relinquish physical and psychological security, for the benefit of the whole.

It is here, on this earth, not someplace else, that we awaken. Here and now, on this planet, in these conditions, amidst this instability and this beauty, working with the results of our individual and collective actions.

In this very body, however you define it- your body, our bodies, the vast body of this planet. The wider the definition, the more we expand and can live the ennobling life. Awakening, expressed as an appropriate response, in this very body, in this very life.





HOUSE LIFE

Ramiro Ortega, Household Coordinator

Service, dharma practice and community life are the main aspects that make the life of a coordinator. For a period of one to two years we commit to bring mindfulness, inquiry and compassion into our life and work; to give our time and energy to others; and to work to create a harmonious community. The three aspects are important, but for me service is the first motivation for becoming a coordinator.

In a general sense, service is helping or doing work for someone. For a coordinator, this means working to maintain the day to day running of Gaia House, and supporting the yogis who come on retreat. This is our job.

As coordinators do not receive a salary for their work, but room, board and a small stipend to be in touch with family and friends, the work they provide becomes an act of generosity. This is their practice. And this is what I would like to talk about.

Generosity is one of the most important practices in the Dharma. Traditionally, in Asian countries, generosity is the first thing a practitioner develops, followed by virtue. On the one hand, by practising generosity one weakens the selfish tendencies that underlie much of our behaviour. On the other, generosity can be seen as “enlightened self-interest”. Giving to others, doing good for others, ultimately counts in our own interest!

In the Dharma, this means that we purify our mind from defilements, gaining clarity, apart from enjoying the “unworldly” pleasure of doing good to others. But we can see this “enlightened interest” in another way. If we expand our vision of who we are, we can see that who we are,

and our well being, go beyond our bodies and minds, and include our society, the whole world, as well as all the fabric of life and nature. We cannot separate ourselves from other people, or from nature; we form a big and complex “organism”, so the good we do to others or to our environment we are doing also to ourselves.

But even if we consider generosity as something noble, as something good to cultivate, our enquiry does not end here. More questions are raised, and not easy ones! For example what to give and to whom.

In my personal experience, this enquiry about where to give has been very vivid. It has led me to make decisions that have changed my life. In 2012, when I was offered the possibility of serving in Gaia House I did not hesitate even for a second. What better way to put my passion, time and energy than in a place specifically devoted to cure the most fundamental and important maladies of humanity? Giving reaches one of its most meaningful expressions when we give to promote something meaningful! To me this meant to give to an organisation dedicated to purify the mind from the illnesses of greed, hatred and delusion.

But coordinators are not the only ones who practice generosity in Gaia House! I’ve been amazed to witness so many beautiful living examples of generosity among teachers, trustees, members of the staff, volunteers, and the countless yogis that come here to practice. I am really grateful to all of them for showing another way of being, another way of relating, that comes from the deepest regions of the heart and encourage us to step out of our self-centred concerns and to draw from the same source. Thank you to you all.



Pictured Left to Right: Jane Knight, Michael Swan, Susanne O'Brien, Owen Barnett, Lucy Bennetts, Ramiro Ortega, Virginia Kennard, Parvati

Coordinator round-up

In the summer we saw the departure of Brian Watson, the longest-serving coordinator we have ever had (to my knowledge), having offered service in maintenance and beyond for two and half years. And he left smiling! A good sign, I think. Many thanks and a bow to you, Brian. Virginia Kennard has arrived to take over at the helm, having spent recent time studying and practising Dharma here and abroad as well as taking care of her parents. Welcome.

Autumn has brought the arrival of an old-timer back to Gaia House, Owen Barnett, who has come for a short period of service covering in the kitchen, having spent time travelling and practising in India after his last period of service. Thanks to Owen for his flexibility and service in stepping in at late notice. He took the reins from Ray Richardson who spent 16 months here cooking up hearty food. Thanks to Ray for everything he offered here.

We also offer a big welcome to Jane Willis, who arrives to take over in reception following recent years also spent practising and travelling. She takes over from Mark Ovland, who has been a friendly and efficient presence in reception; his can-do-and-will-do attitude and willingness to give have been inspiring.

The coming months will see many changes in the coordinator group. In the winter and early part of next year, we will be recruiting for kitchen positions, as well as a household and reception position. Full information and application packs will be available on the website under 'Working Here'. Keep a close eye if you are interested as the positions/application packs will be put up for a limited time as and when we have a clearer sense of a time frame. You are also welcome to call Sarah Abdy on 01626 323881 or email admin@gaiahouse.co.uk if you have further questions.

REPORT

FROM THE INTERNATIONAL INSIGHT MEDITATION TEACHER MEETING

In June, 60 Insight Meditation teachers from different countries gathered for their four yearly meeting. The teachers dedicated time for deeper engagement with a number of topics, including a training on undoing racism; a group exploration of the nuances of 'mindfulness'; teacher support; the growing secular mindfulness movement and climate change.

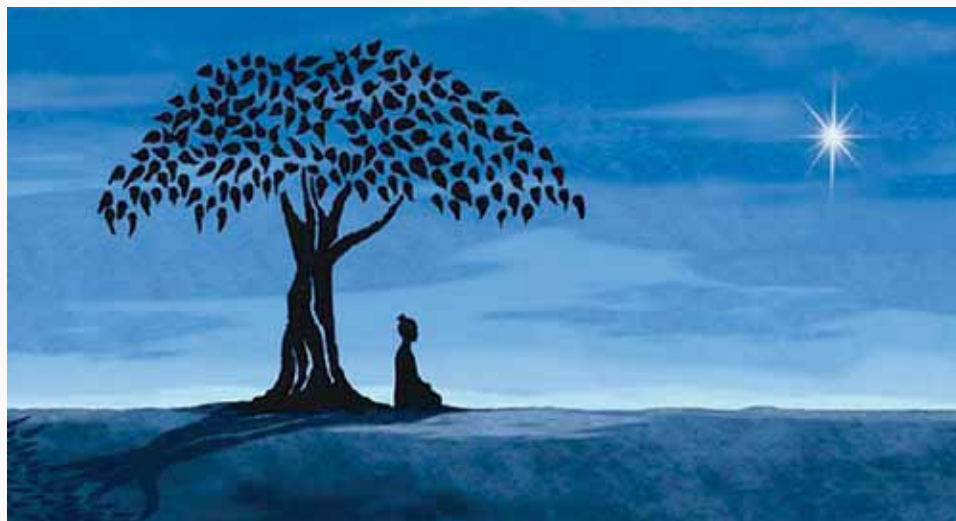
It was a privilege to meet and attend to the dharma together. From the fine detail of the mind and the breath, to the major global crises and injustices of our time.

One outcome of the meeting is that the topic of climate change is now clearly in the zeitgeist of this particular teacher community. Some teachers are already attending to this topic, and here we can also benefit from the learning and inspiration that can happen within a larger group that crosses national boundaries between sanghas.

Responses include:

- **Earth Care Week** Oct 1-7 2013: for practitioners and sanghas to focus on practices and actions around earth care. Have a look at the One Earth Sangha website for ideas and inspirations. We hope this might become a yearly event and act as a springboard for furthering our efforts throughout the year.
- Taking pledges and making commitments around energy usage.
- Sharing the Dharma of Climate Change.
- Other initiatives and discussions are happening between different groups.

May all sentient life on this planet; the incredible diversity of fellow human beings and all other species, those of us here now and those yet to be born, may all beings be safe and protected.



RETREATS, TEACHINGS AND WORKSHOPS

Insight Meditation weekend near Eastbourne,

8-10, November 2013

Yanai Postelnik

A residential retreat in silence, on the South Downs in the beauty of the Seven Sisters reserve. An opportunity to experience the calm, warmth and clarity nurtured in Vipassana practice.

Contact Gayles Retreat

Tel: 07721 023 845

info@retreattogayles.co.uk

www.retreattogayles.co.uk

Dartmoor Walking and Meditation retreat, Devon

17-21 April 2014

Yanai Postelnik

This 4th Dartmoor walking retreat will again offer 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, and sitting in meditation. The Gidleigh village hall provides an ideal base, with ample secluded camping space, a spacious hall with heating, toilets, a shower and kitchen.

Contact Faith: walkingretreat@gmail.com

SanghaSeva Retreats

www.sanghaseva.org

Zohar Lavie and Nathan Glyde

Anandwan Retreats, India

2 - 9 December, 2013

Somnath Silent Meditation Retreat

*11 December, 2013 - 2 January, 2014
Work Retreat,*

Anandwan is a vibrant and inspiring community, comprising cured leprosy patients and people with any "disability" that has led them to be cast out from their families and societies. The work retreat offers time for living and working in the community alongside the residents, developing friendships and learning new skills.

Dharmalaya Sustainable Living Work Retreat, India

17 - 24 March, 2014

Silent Meditation Retreat,

25 March - 4 April, 2014 Work Retreat

Dharmalaya is dedicated to bringing together sustainable development, ecological building, and spiritual growth. The work retreat offers time for living and working as a community, developing friendships and learning new skills. We will be participating in the creation of food gardens, permaculture landscaping, and earth building.

Working Towards a Sustainable Future, Centre for Alternative Technology, mid Wales

23-27 June, 2014

Kirsten Kratz

The Centre for Alternative Technology (CAT) is the UK's leading centre for environmental courses. This work retreat offers an opportunity to nourish and express our care for life on Earth and our wish for a more sustainable world, as we live in one of the CAT Eco-Cabins and work on site in the community.

London Insight Meditation

Events at various locations around London

16-17 November	Christina Feldman, Weekend Retreat (optional 1 or 2 days)
30 November	John Peacock, Study Day on Dhammapada
8 December	Rob Burbea, Day Retreat
15 December	Stephen Batchelor, Day Retreat
11 January	Jenny Wilks, Sitting Groups Day
26 January	Yanai Postelnik, Day Retreat
9 February	Martin Aylward, Day Retreat
17 February	Jake Dartington, beginners' evening
22 February	Locana, Nonviolent Communication Workshop
9 March	Catherine McGee, Day Retreat
22-27 March	Martin Aylward, 6 day course
6 April	John Peacock, Day Retreat
4 May	Martine Batchelor, Day Retreat
30-31 May	Rick Hanson, Evening Talk and Day Workshop

Teachers offer personal interviews in London throughout the year.

New events are added all the time: please register on the London Insight Meditation website to receive email updates.

There is a network of sitting groups in and around London informally linked with us, including study groups with particular themes.

CONTACT DETAILS:

enquiries@londoninsight.org | 07954 472771 | www.londoninsight.org
www.facebook.com/londoninsight | Twitter: @londoninsight

Regional Retreats

OXFORD

30 Nov	Christina Feldman
25 Jan	Yanai Postelnik
1 Mar	Jake Dartington
29 Mar	Norman Feldman
31 May	Catherine McGee

Venue: Headington Parish Hall

Time: 10am–5pm, registration from 9.15am

Cost: £10 (£5 concessions)

Contact - Brigid or David on
01608 811940

www.oxfordgaiahousetretreats.co.uk

SHEFFIELD

18 Oct	Sangha afternoon
23 Nov	Sangha afternoon
30 Dec -1 Jan	Jake Dartington
22-23 Mar	Rob Burbea

Contact - sghsg2009@gmail.com

<http://www.sheffieldinsightmeditation.org.uk/>

MILTON KEYNES

7 - 9 Feb Helen Stephenson

Yoga and Meditation Weekend
Residential Retreat

Contact - info@mindfulnessmk.co.uk
www.mindfulnessmk.co.uk

CAMBRIDGE

7 Dec Christina Feldman

8 Mar Catherine McGee

3 May Martine Batchelor

Contact - cambridgeinsight@gmail.com
www.cambridgedayretreats.wordpress.com/

POOLE

10 Nov Jenny Wilks

Contact - Jacqui jacquin06@yahoo.co.uk

BRIGHTON

7 Dec Rob Burbea

Info - www.bodhitreebrighton.org.uk

Sitting Groups

A network of meditation groups has developed throughout the UK and beyond, often set up by people who have spent time at Gaia House and wish to remain connected with this retreat centre and their experiences here.

If you run a sitting meditation group and your name and details are not featured here, please let us know and we can add you to this list and our website. Please also email comms@gaiahouse.co.uk to inform us of any changes to your group's current information.

AVON & SOMERSET

BATH Bath Buddhist Group
www.bathbuddhists.co.uk

BRISTOL Jill Bird or Julia Wallond
0117 9551360 Jill Bird
0797 704 503 julia.wallond@yahoo.com

BRISTOL enquires@bristolchan.co.uk
0117 924 8819 Mike Masheder
0117 977 4683 Pat Simmons

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01539 729793

DEVON

ASHBURTON
01752 893165

BARNSTAPLE
01271 850321

EXETER
01392 874386

01392 496079

PLYMOUTH
01752 224902

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01548 842478

TOTNES
01803 520798

TOTNES
01803 849137

NEWTON ABBOT
01626 333613

SHARPHAM, TOTNES
01803 732542

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BLANDFORD
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