



GAIA HOUSE

INSIGHT MEDITATION IN THE BUDDHIST TRADITION

2019  
ANNUAL  
REVIEW



## WELCOME



As I write we are enjoying a beautiful summer at Gaia House, my third here as Director. I'm really starting to appreciate the depth of interconnection that keeps our centre operating so smoothly for the thousands of people who experience the challenge, peace and insight that is available here. In this, our newly-styled 2019 Annual Review (what was our Newsletter), you'll have an opportunity to hear people from all parts of our community describe their connection to Gaia House. One of the challenges of a silent retreat centre are

the very brief opportunities to connect at the beginning and end of retreats, so I hope that this review will help you hear the voices of our founders, teachers, trustees, coordinators, volunteers, staff and retreatants, and in doing so, you feel connected to our wide and generous family.

Since beginning this role, we've been on quite a journey of enquiry and growth and you can read here how our building development plans have changed and grown alongside stories of growth from individuals that have been touched by the practice here.

Our practice at Gaia House is informed by the Dharma; along with "the teaching of the Buddha", the word 'Dharma' could be translated as "the nature of what is" or "reality" – the Buddha wanted to teach us how things are and to live accordingly. As a modern incarnation of a Dharma centre, we at Gaia House are deeply concerned with the true nature of things, and while 2,500 year-old texts can

be helpful, the vitality of Dharma practice comes from our direct and personal experience of investigation. As a community, we have of late been particularly investigating our relationship to each other and to the environment we live in.

By actively engaging with a diverse range of people, in meetings, training sessions, through feedback forms and on retreat, we have been learning about ways in which people experience barriers to participation at Gaia House. Our inquiry has helped us to understand what we do that makes things more challenging, how unconscious relationships to power and privilege might cause harm and also what we might do or how we might understand differently to

help remove or mitigate barriers to the Dharma offered at our centre. As we often find in meditation, it's only when we look with care and sustained attention that we discover how we are creating problems and the more we unveil, the more we realise the depth of our ignorance. But it is a courageous heart that goes against the stream and I have been inspired time and again by people's willingness to face the difficult, to learn and change in response to deeper understanding. There is much work to do on this endless path, and I hope that we continue to hear feedback from our supporters to help us develop our practice.

The courage of our community has also been evident in responses to the ecological crisis our planet now faces. Turning toward the difficult, facing reality and living accordingly has inspired people from all branches of the Gaia House family. In this review you will have a chance to read how some of us have been involved in efforts to raise awareness of the need for urgent and significant action to minimise human contribution to global warming and the inevitable suffering that goes with this. May we all continue to enjoy our beautiful summers.

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## A TRUSTEE'S PERSPECTIVE

**Tim Blanch**

Gaia House trustees are responsible for the management of the charity: upholding its values and purpose, ensuring that it is financially viable, operating openly and ethically, and supporting the staff in managing its day to day operations effectively. I have only been a Trustee for a year, but have been coming to Gaia House as a meditator for more years than I care to remember, so it has been a fascinating transition for me, seeing the work of Gaia House from the other side. Our role is to lead the overall strategy of the Trust, not to manage the day to day, which is done by the staff and volunteer coordinators, so we meet four or five times a year for a day, and have other shorter meetings, often online via zoom, since we are scattered around the country.

In my first year we have spent a lot of time discussing the proposed building programme and the purchase of a neighbouring property, both of which are big issues with far-reaching implications. We routinely have to consider and agree financial reports, and ensure that we comply with legislation. But discussions have also included a wide range of issues,

- diversity and inclusion
- safeguarding
- a contractual dispute with the contractor who installed the new sewage system
- support for resident coordinators
- the role of the resident teacher
- the need for single bedrooms and better wheelchair access
- what support people coming to Gaia House would like when they are back in their own communities.

At every meeting we have reports from managers and coordinators on the issues

that they are facing in managing the house, so that our discussions are grounded in the practice and ethos of the house.

We have also concentrated this year on building really good communications between the various stakeholders in the Trust; teachers, staff, volunteer coordinators, other volunteers and the wider community of people who come to Gaia House, to ensure that any decisions we make about the development of Gaia House reflect the views of the wider stakeholders, and build on the unique role that Gaia House has developed over the years.

As a new trustee I have been made incredibly welcome, meetings have been a pleasure to attend with plenty of laughter and I have also found that being a trustee has been a support to my practice. We now have a regular turnover of trustees as we each complete our term of service, so if this opportunity is of interest, please read the information on the website about becoming a trustee.

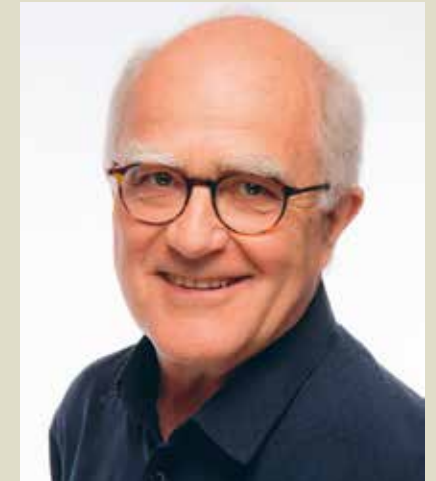
## PATRONS OF GAIA HOUSE

We are delighted to announce that Christina Feldman and Stephen Batchelor have agreed to become patrons of Gaia House. As two of our longest-standing teachers, we are deeply grateful for all the ways they have contributed to making Gaia House what it is today and their on-going support means a great deal.



*"I am delighted to accept the invitation to be a patron of Gaia House. Since 1983, as one of the co-founders of Gaia House it has always been one of my deepest wishes to see Gaia House thrive as a dharma centre of excellence. In the many years that have passed since then thousands of people have benefitted from the teachings offered at Gaia House and the serenity of the centre. I am happy to be part of the continuing journey."*

Christina Feldman



*"Over the past thirty years, as a teacher, sometime trustee, and member of various committees, I have had the privilege of seeing Gaia House evolve from a small community of committed meditators into the thriving organization it has become today. As I begin to step back from my direct involvement in Gaia House, it is a great honour to be invited to serve as a patron. I look forward to supporting the future flourishing of the centre as it passes into the capable hands of new generations of teachers, trustees, staff, and coordinators."*

Stephen Batchelor



## TEACHER COUNCIL UPDATE

**Martine Batchelor**

First and foremost I would like to express my thanks and appreciation for the dedicated work of all the various teams at Gaia House, who make its activities possible. The teachers on the Council also see themselves as a team and we do our best to help in any ways we can.

Since the founding of Gaia House Christina Feldman has been incredibly dedicated in making the centre a precious resource for Dharma practice. Yet recently, due to family obligations, it has been difficult for her to participate as much as she once did. Stephen Batchelor has also served on the Teacher Council and offered many years of dedicated service to the centre in a number of ways. Both Christina and Stephen feel it is the time now to step back from their active involvement in the Teacher Council but still remain connected to Gaia House in order to continue offering their endorsement and support. Both have thus agreed to become patrons of Gaia House. We thank them deeply for all their years of service.

All the teams sustaining Gaia House wish to move forward with the plans to improve the facility. As we know, this has been somewhat of a tumultuous ride, swinging back and forth between the alternatives of construction on site and purchase of a new property. This is truly impermanence in action. We all move with the ebbs and flows. Now that we are back to construction, a management team has been constituted to explore and move forward with the building projects. This team will be

in constant consultation with the larger body of the organisation. Kirsten and myself have agreed to be the teacher representatives of this management committee, and look forward to working with the two trustees, staff and coordinator members on the committee. We have had one meeting already, and it is a relief to learn that one of the trustees knows a great deal about construction work!

Rob Burbea is also part of the Teacher Council but has been unwell for some time with a serious illness. The other members of the council are supporting him in as many ways as they can. We are all deeply concerned about him. We were relieved and grateful that he was able to co-lead a retreat this spring with Catherine McGee.

It is with great joy that we have seen dedicated practitioners train to become teachers. We are happy to announce that Gavin Milne and Katrin Heyde have graduated from their training and are now beginning to teach on retreats. We are also glad that several long-term practitioners from our sangha are participating in the three-year teacher training organised by Bodhi College. Some of them could graduate as teachers by the end of 2020.



## LOVE IN THE TIME OF EXTINCTION. DHARMA PRACTICE IN THE FACE OF AN EMERGENCY

**Yanai Postelnik**

*This April I found myself taking part in a climate protest action with Extinction Rebellion, on Waterloo Bridge in London, participating in 10 days of international non-violent civil disobedience.*

As followers of the Buddha's teachings of wisdom and compassion, we are called to address suffering by turning towards what is true, even when this is not easy, and finding what might be appropriate, skilful, and possible in response.

How do we respond when we hear about unprecedented climate destabilisation and accelerating environmental destruction happening around the globe? Intensifying

extreme weather events, countless families and communities losing their homes, land and food security, rapid species loss, melting polar ice caps, degrading soil fertility, rivers and lakes poisoned by industrial waste, and oceans choking in plastic.

...Together with many friends, including other meditators and dharma practitioners, we chose to cause peaceful disruption, seeking to bring attention to the urgent need for action in the face



*of an unfolding emergency. Over one thousand of us were arrested and are being prosecuted, and I feel it is my dharma practice that calls me to act in this way...*

The 2018 IPCC UN report on climate change was unequivocal in stating that we have just 12 years to avert climate catastrophe, and the 2019 IPBES UN biodiversity report confirms that the massive loss of living creatures, species and living ecosystems is accelerating. Further recent research and analysis also predicts a significant risk of social breakdown, driven by food scarcity, mass migration and conflict over scarce resources, and the possibility of human extinction if we do not change the way our society and economy function.

Take a moment to consciously breath, and to feel your body sitting on the earth as you contemplate: this is Dukkha (that which is hard to bear): and there is a cause, and an end and a path to be found. And just as the four noble truths each have an action associated with them: the first (dukkha/suffering) is to be understood... the second (craving/tanha) to be let go of... so too this truth of ecological and climate dukkha calls for action.

The climate and ecological crisis is at its heart a crisis of spirit. A crisis of disconnection, born of failing to see our sacred and inseparable interconnection with, and dependance upon, everything. Everything that we have mistakenly called "other" and failed to value equally as ourselves. What we do to our planet we do to ourselves, and our current trajectory of collective self-harm calls for the love and concern in our hearts to be given courageous expression.

*...It was not always easy to hold our ground: days were hot, nights were cold, and we did not get a lot of sleep, day after day on the bridge. Discomforts and inconveniences inevitably come with making a commitment. But we made the choice to stay: facing arrest, and prosecution. We found comfort in our shared dedication and connection with each other, and in the many trees and plants we had brought to 'rewild' the bridge - which we renamed the Garden Bridge. And we marvelled at and delighted in the bees and butterflies that came to join us, and the children too. Father Giles of the nearby Waterloo Church offered us refuge*

*in the crypt - with toilets and a place to sleep for those who took on the night shifts....*

We hear the clear and overwhelming scientific consensus, calling for urgent and uncompromising action, to save our children, our communities and our world from ecological devastation. And we see this call being disregarded, denied or ignored in the pursuit of profit, convenience and consumption.

This dukkha is hard to bear and the temptation to turn away is understandable. Dharma teachings ask us to turn towards this painful contemplation, and to open to whatever we feel in response: fear, grief, anger, horror, denial, numbness, scepticism, confusion, and more.

As we contemplate both the actions of those who seek material gain from harmful and destructive activity, and equally our own limitations in changing the way we live, the dharma teachings also remind us that identifying with and acting on anger, judgement and blame towards others or ourselves, is unhelpful. We may need to seek the support of friends and loved ones in acknowledging our responses and feeling the grief and pain, and to take time to immerse ourselves in whatever we find brings nourishment and reconnection. And then find ways to harness the energy of our love and concern: demanding urgent effective action from the leaders of our countries and our world, and making such changes as we can individually.

The scale and urgency of our situation demands concerted collective action by central government. It is easy to feel despair and frustration as the call to change direction is ignored: as we see the commissioning of a new UK coal mine, approval for a new runway at Heathrow, and the subsidising of the fossil fuel industry, while support for renewables is undermined.

*...Again and again the police approached in large numbers, having been told to use 'the full force of the law.' We sat together in solidarity with each other and all the people, beings and living things who are in danger, chanting "police we love you, we're doing this for your children too" as they carried us off...*



Non-violent mass civil disobedience gives ordinary people a voice that cannot be ignored, by harnessing the power of our collective concern, focused through disruptive action and sacrifice. It can precipitate real change, e.g. the Indian independence movement led by Gandhi, and the American civil rights movement, inspired by Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King, and research confirms its effectiveness.

*... I was arrested four times. We spoke with the officers about our concerns as we were arrested, and often found ourselves making warm connections with them, on the way to the police cells...*

Spirituality recognises the value and sacredness of all living things and living systems, and asks us to prioritise the collective wellbeing over pursuing personal gain or advantage. To let go of our comfort and convenience, and take risks with our privilege and even our liberty, in the service of our shared interest and the common good, may be seen as a sacred duty. It brings a deepening of spiritual wellbeing, in service of the fragile web of life we are part of. In the words of Martin Luther King "Never be afraid to do what is right. Society's punishments are small, compared to the wounds we inflict on our soul when we look the other way."

I cannot know what you need to do, or what you should do. But as you contemplate your own

choices, I invite you to keep informing yourself and listening to your heart, so you can find your authentic course of action. In this realm of mutual interdependence, our intentional actions cannot guarantee outcomes, but I have a deep confidence that always they make a difference.

*...and an atmosphere of heartfelt love, peace and goodness stayed with us, even when we were all finally cleared from the bridge, a full week after we arrived...*

I invite you to remember the future is always uncertain, and that our spiritual practice is a foundation for meeting whatever comes, with an open heart. As we face the actuality of our situation, it is so important that we all cultivate the boundless dimensions of heart:

- deepening in loving kindness,
- acting where we can with compassion and courage,
- making a practice of acknowledging and appreciating all that is fortunate, beautiful and precious, and
- bowing to the natural, lawful and unstoppable unfoldment of life, with equanimity.

Is it not still remarkable, inexplicable, sacred and blessed that we are here at all?



# EXTINCTION REBELLION: PUTTING CLIMATE BACK IN THE HEADLINES

Many sangha members participated in the Extinction Rebellion demonstration in London in April, which saw major roads and bridges in the capital shut down for over a week and resulted in more than 1,000 arrests.



"On Waterloo Bridge I experienced the power, beauty and necessity of non-violent civil disobedience. In police custody I experienced despair. My pain was not abstract but deeply personal, rooted in the love for my four nieces, aged three to eleven, who were with me on the bridge. Representing all children alive, I had to accept the heart-breaking truth that we cannot assure they will inherit a liveable Earth. Every day of collective and individual complacency, procrastination and denial of the climate emergency will make it less likely. Business as usual is not an option anymore."

Kirsten Kratz



"My week at the international rebellion was exhilarating, exhausting and inspiring in equal measure. I was deeply moved to see the number of people willing to be arrested to bring awareness to this climate emergency. It has made me think deeply about my priorities in life, my relationship to the natural world, and how I can better devote my time and energy in service to the environment."

Ali Johnson



"Taking part in the Extinction Rebellion events in London has been quite a revelation for me, and for friends old and new who I shared that time with. XR is a committed, passionate, heartfelt, intelligent, creative and playful sangha, engaged in action born out of love for our miraculous planet and all of its inhabitants: human, animal, plant and otherwise. It shows that through strong action guided by compassion, heart and genuine togetherness, a new way that honours our natural life it, is possible. And we are finally starting to be heard. Now our leaders must act."

Dan Hillier







## PERMISSION TO DO NOTHING...

**Jake Gill, Household Coordinator**

I've just returned from a solitary retreat at the kuti, at the Barn Retreat near Tonnes. This is one of the great perks of being a coordinator; we get to go and spend a week at the "other place", and their coordinators can come here. The kuti is a simple woodland hut, much like those found in traditional forest monasteries. I was very grateful for the seclusion, and the opportunity for a truly simple life – collecting my one meal of the day\*; a couple of hours' splitting logs; a bit of chanting in the morning and evening; reading a few *Dhammapada* verses. Oh, and firing up the wood burner. (Actually, it sounds quite busy when you list it like this!).

But the rest of the time, I could just sit and walk.

\*The Barn were very generous with provisions for self-catering; it was my own choice to make lunch my only meal, kindly shared from Barn retreatants' own cooking.

When Ajahn Brahm emerged from his 6-month solitary retreat, he said: "I tried my hardest not to do anything". In my retreat of 6 nights, I aimed to follow that example. Doing nothing, or, "non-doing" is one aspect of meditation in the tradition I like to follow. Right Effort has been described as "the effort to stop all effort." That is, to restrain that aspect of the mind that's always straining to get things done: "the doer"; freeing up space for the "knower", until, eventually, even that falls away, and great wisdom arises. Sounds quite simple?

It occurred to me one morning as I stepped out of the kuti, down to the walking path – It's like I'm off to start my day's work; except that just means walking, sitting, doing nothing. Right

away I recognised what feels special about being on solitary retreat, or any retreat: I knew I had full permission, just to practise; my *job* was to do nothing.

Occasionally as a coordinator I've wondered why it feels difficult at times to keep a consistency in practice – am I lacking in time or energy? Sometimes, maybe. But more often, I think it's that I'm not giving myself permission to do nothing.

And why is this?

It's this pervasive conditioning, inherent to the world of duties and responsibilities, which says *Surely*, we ought to be doing *something*. It's not that Gaia House or anyone in particular does

this—of course we can practise in all sorts of ways as a coordinator, though it's true we do hold many duties and responsibilities, chiefly so that the people coming on retreat can let go of theirs. No—we're all subject to this "doer", and its especially amped-up manifestation in our present society. We sit down on the cushion, or even just look at it, and; "isn't there something you should be *doing*?" So, this, I feel, is what's so important about providing a space for retreats.

In a month's time, I will be leaving Gaia and spending 3 months at Bodhinyana, Ajahn Brahm's monastery in Western Australia, taking part in their annual "Rains" retreat. I will be helping out around the place (a bit like a coordinator!) but also looking to do lots of nothing, with a master's guidance. Shortly

after the Rains, in October, Ajahn will be here teaching a residential retreat at Gaia for the first time. Ironically, I might not be here for that occasion! Though my plans beyond October are still unknown, I very much look forward to returning to Gaia at some point, perhaps for a personal retreat – yet another coordinator perk!

It's been a privilege to stay and serve here for 15 months – thank you to everyone for this opportunity. I'll be handing over my place in a wonderful group of coordinators—now's a great time for anyone to think about becoming a coordinator, or come do a retreat here with the fantastic support they offer. In the meantime, I hope we will all savour those times we get to do nothing, until one day—at last—there really is nothing at all left to be done.



# OUR BUILDING DEVELOPMENT JOURNEY CONTINUES

Since our last annual review, the journey of our development plans has involved further challenges and surprises!

Having had our offer accepted on neighbouring Oak House, the purchase was nearing completion after months of work behind the scenes, when suddenly, and much to our disappointment, the sellers unexpectedly withdrew from the agreement in May, putting an end to what had seemed like a very good opportunity for Gaia House.

After a period of gathering our thoughts, we are now proceeding with our original plans to develop our main site, as the need to increase the number of single rooms and bathrooms we can offer to retreatants continues, and many have given very generously to help us realise our aims.

A steering group of representatives from the Teacher Council, the Board of Trustees and staff met to discuss options and priorities and, thanks to the open-hearted and generous support of our Building Appeal, we have sufficient funds to proceed with Phase 1 – the garage block re-build.

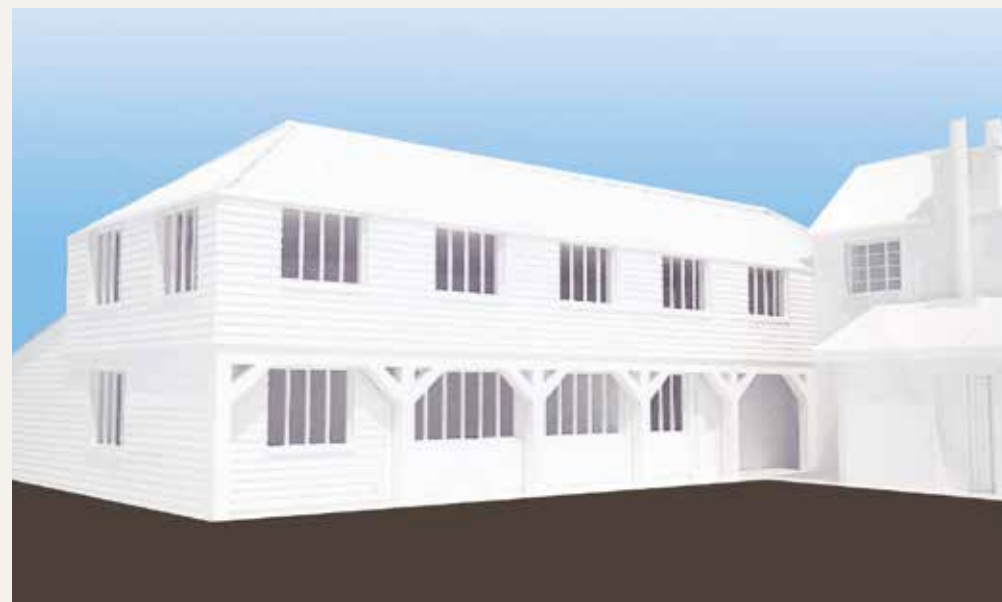
As you can see from the image above, this will involve taking down the crumbling garages at the back of the Hermitage Wing and re-developing them into a new two-storey wing, which will enable us to double the number of single rooms we can offer to

group retreatants, as well as provide badly-needed extra bathrooms.

Phase 2, for which we will be continuing to raise funds, will be the Garden Wing expansion. This will see the development of the ground floor of the Garden Wing to provide an accessible bedroom and bathroom suite, as well as more showers and toilets close to the Meditation Hall. The final component planned is a beautiful covered walking meditation area running alongside the Meditation Hall.

We are excited to be commencing Phase 1 this summer, with the dismantling of the existing garages. The aim is to put in footings for a timber frame structure in January next year and develop the rest of the building throughout 2020.

Our retreat programme will continue as normal and care will be taken to undertake noisier work in between group retreats when personal retreatants will have use of the main meditation hall farthest from the building work. We would like to take this opportunity to say once again how grateful we are for the support of our sangha during this period of transition and evolution. The continued expressions of love and generosity we receive will help Gaia House to blossom into this next incarnation for the benefit of all who come here.







## THE VIEW FROM MY WINDOW

Sarah Abdy

I write this piece exactly 15 years ago to the day that I started at Gaia House. I'm looking out of my office window at the arrival of spring for another year – I've never moved office so my view has always been the same, looking down to the pond and across the garden. But the view is always changing, always looking slightly different depending on the weather, the season, the light and the time of day.

When I joined Gaia House 15 years ago, it was a world away from the work that I'd encountered previously. Running a busy B&B and working in the corporate sector of forklift trucks was my territory. I didn't know how I would ever be of value or fit in; surely I wouldn't last.

Gaia House quickly took me under its wing. Those who know me know that working in a place of silence wouldn't have been easy for me in those first few months but over the years it is the noble silence which I've learned to value more than anything else. As well as enabling me to work for an organisation that cares about what it does and its place in the world, Gaia House has given me the opportunity, and safe place, to learn about myself through practice – a practice that I didn't have when I started, but one that I wouldn't be without now.

Impermanence is a word that is frequently used here, both in practice and in a work context. Gaia House has changed immeasurably since I started. Though I would rather use the word 'evolved'. Back then, there were very few full retreats each year and only four members of non-residential staff to support the eight coordinators in their essential and dedicated work running

the house and looking after our retreatants. Since I joined I've worked alongside 107 coordinators, been part of at least 214 coordinator try-outs, seen about 630 group retreats come and go and many thousands of wonderful retreatants walk through our door. The non-residential staff team has grown over the years in recognition of the increasing complexity involved in running both a charity and a busy retreat centre that's open 365 days of the year. Working at Gaia House is truly a vocation, and it shows in the quality and care with which everyone carries out their work.

I sometimes help out at registration for our group retreats and I love meeting people from many different walks of life and finding out about them. It reminds me in that moment why we do what we do here and why Gaia House plays such an important part in people's lives. It's lovely to see people emerge from a retreat with a new learning about their practice and about themselves.

I've cherished the past 15 years that I've worked here, and for as long as it's possible, I'll continue to cherish it and those I work with and walk alongside on this amazing path.

## REPLENISHING THE FAB FUND



These days at Gaia House, a group retreat is very likely to include at least two retreatants who would not be on their cushions were it not for support from the Financial Assistance and Bursaries (FAB) Fund. At the same time, there are likely to be one or two personal retreatants in the Hermitage thanks to the FAB Fund. It's really important to Gaia House to be able to support accessibility in this way.

Although we keep our Standard rate as low as possible, the number of people wanting to come on retreat with support from the FAB Fund is increasing. In 2018 alone we saw a 17% increase in requests for financial assistance.

The Fund is financed through cancellation fees, supporter rates and donations from the Gaia House sangha, who give very generously. In fact, for the past several years the FAB Fund has been able to meet the increased demand in part thanks to one very significant donation.

As this particular bounty is coming to an end, we are looking to our sangha to help us re-grow the bounty, and support the flourishing of financial accessibility at Gaia House. This is an opportunity to practice generosity (Dana) and support our continuing commitment to making the wisdom and refuge of the Dharma available to all who seek it.

**You can establish a regular donation or make a one-off gift to the FAB Fund at the end of your next retreat or online at [www.gaiahouse.co.uk/support-us/fab/](http://www.gaiahouse.co.uk/support-us/fab/) Thank you!**

*"Attending the 10-day retreat at Gaia House was transformative! Literally opening up an unknown inner landscape and way of being. It's strange because at times I mainly felt fear and doubt! In my background it's not common or possible to be able to go to the countryside for a meditation retreat so I am very, very grateful to all those who have made the FAB Fund possible and helped change my life. Thank you!" Rishi*

# GAIA HOUSE IN 2018

- **43** group retreats attended by **1,710** people
- **516** people came on personal retreat for a total of **4,217 nights**
- **34%** of retreatants had never been to Gaia House before
- **21%** received some form of financial assistance
- **10.5%** were under the age of 30 years
- **884** people booked a waiting list place



- Our Financial Assistance and Bursaries Fund made grants of **£69,569** to **440** retreatants, including support for **50** young people via the Young Persons Rate and **10** three-month personal retreat bursaries



In excess of  
**1,300**  
volunteer hours were  
contributed



We reclaimed  
**£11,214**  
in Gift Aid from HMRC

## INCOME

	2017	2018
Retreat bookings	£521,190	£568,879
Donations (FAB Fund, General Fund and Building Fund)	£209,425	£168,726
Other	£23,111	£17,935
<b>Total operating income</b>	<b>£753,726</b>	<b>£755,540</b>

## EXPENDITURE

Programme delivery	£624,430	£647,788
Governance	£6,450	£12,294
<b>Total operating expenditure</b>	<b>£630,880</b>	<b>£660,082</b>

## Surplus / deficit

**£122,846**

**£95,458**

**96%**

of those who completed a  
feedback form said they would  
return to Gaia House



The kitchen used  
**1,937kg**  
carrots

**60%**



of the milk  
consumed in  
the  
house was  
non-dairy





## A RETREATANT PERSPECTIVE

**Jon Bowden**

I first arrived at Gaia House in early 2016 to attend a three-night silent group retreat. Having developed a regular sitting practice (more about this below) meditation was not completely new to me but... a three night retreat meant two whole days of silence. Knowing that I would need to speak at some times I thought I'd better check this out first.

My issue here was not one of living in sustained silence as such – I guess most of us struggle with this at some time or other - but one of eyesight. I live with severe visual impairment and unfamiliar settings are a particular challenge. From orientation to self-service meals, daily work etc all need to be approached carefully. So, as usual, it was time to make plans.

A couple of phone calls later it was all pretty much sorted. Assistance had been arranged, necessary adjustments/adaptations made and the retreat was, for me, fully accessible. For instance, as I cannot adequately identify or serve food I was given an assistant to help with this task and was able to speak to the assistant as necessary. Because of all the help offered I felt free to make the retreat without these needs being a distraction.

The way that these arrangements were made and put into practice was particularly noticeable - everyone involved worked with skill, clarity and care. There was a real sense of openness and kindness to the whole of the retreat and this first time spent at Gaia House left me feeling welcomed and encouraged to continue practice with renewed energy.

Now, a little about how I came to Gaia House in the first place. Meditation practice began again for me in 2012 after a gap of about 12 years. I attended an eight-week mindfulness course and this re-ignited my desire to practise regularly. Meditation no longer felt too difficult to do or to keep up and I was, and still am, committed to daily sitting practice again. Following this came involvement in a couple of local sitting groups in Oxford UK. Through one of these I was introduced to Oxford Insight Meditation and their programme of day retreats – led by teachers from Gaia House. As the day retreats were really beneficial for consolidating practice, as well as learning about the Dharma, after a while I thought I'd like to try a residential retreat.

Since that first visit I have returned for group retreats four times, most recently in spring 2019. Each retreat has been different, but the constancy of people working to make them all accessible for me has not changed, if anything it has improved with experience. The retreats themselves have varied in duration from three to nine nights and all have been of great value in fostering a deepening of practice that has carried on back at home. Each retreat has been fruitful and I hope to return again sometime soon.

## NEW ONLINE SITTING GROUP

Gaia House is piloting an online monthly sitting group on the first Monday of each month from 8-9pm (UK time) via the easy to use Zoom platform.

Gavin Milne is facilitating the first few meetings: 5 August, 2 September, 7 October, 4 November, 2 December and 6 January. The emphasis will be on daily life practice, with each session comprising a meditation, some Dharma reflections, and time for some questions.

The group is suitable for all levels of experience, although some familiarity with Buddhist teachings and prior experience of either an evening course or a retreat will be assumed.

Zoom is web-based so does not require any software to be downloaded but it does require a computer with speakers or headphones and a reasonable internet connection to stream live video, and ideally a camera and microphone.

You are welcome to join on any dates that suit you, although we ask you to attend for the whole of each meeting.



Please see the Gaia House website for more details.

# 2020 PREVIEW

We are very much looking forward to welcoming Bonnie Duran to Gaia House for the first time, as part of our 2020 programme. A member of Spirit Rock's Teachers Council, Bonnie will be leading a retreat together with Anushka Fernandopulle. Alongside her work as a Buddhist teacher, Bonnie has also worked in public health research, evaluation and education among tribes, native organisations and other communities of colour for over 35 years.

## Tell us about your Dharma background – what drew you to Buddhist practice?

At 23, I moved from San Francisco to Europe to live the expatriate life and, after a number of years, found my way on the well-travelled path to Nepal and India. I spent a month on retreat at the Tibetan Buddhist Kopan Monastery in Nepal. It was kind of intense, but I felt like I had come home – as a Native American (Opelousas/Coushatta) mixed race person, I looked much more like the Tibetan people than the people in Europe. During this time, I completely fell in love with the Dharma and went on to Bodhgaya and Dharamsala for more retreats and Dharma teachings.

Back in the US a year later, I took advantage of the retreat opportunities provided by the growing Western Theravada community and also found my way back to Native spirituality through the



Lakota Sun Dance, Sweat Lodge ceremonies, and the Native American Church.

At that time, the Western Buddhist community, outside of the Asian immigrant churches, was predominantly white. I often felt very out of place and invisible at sangha meetings and could hardly afford the retreats.

In 1999 I attended my first people of colour retreat with Joseph Goldstein and George Mumford and have sat annually with these teachers since then. The level of relaxation I was able to reach just by sitting with people of colour was transformative. From that retreat we started a people of colour sangha in 2002, and our group now includes white people who want to sit with us and support us as people of colour.

In our talking circles we often discuss the ways the Dharma helps us to overcome our internalised oppression and find ways to more skilfully deal with the hurt we all encounter. Although healing is a life-long process for us all, my life is much more peaceful and clear.

## What, for you, is the purpose and meaning of Buddhist practice?

Awakening! Dharma practice is to walk the eight-fold path – to have insight into conditioned existence as imperfect, impermanent, and impersonal. An important

purpose of the practice is to have wellbeing and happiness come from internal resources and not rely on external conditions for comfort, security, safety, protection, happiness, wellbeing etc.

## What do you think are the particular gifts the Dharma can offer us with the challenges of our era?

The cultivation of wisdom, compassion, and equanimity offer huge support to our practice and our lives in the world.

## Can you tell us a little about your retreat at Gaia House next year?

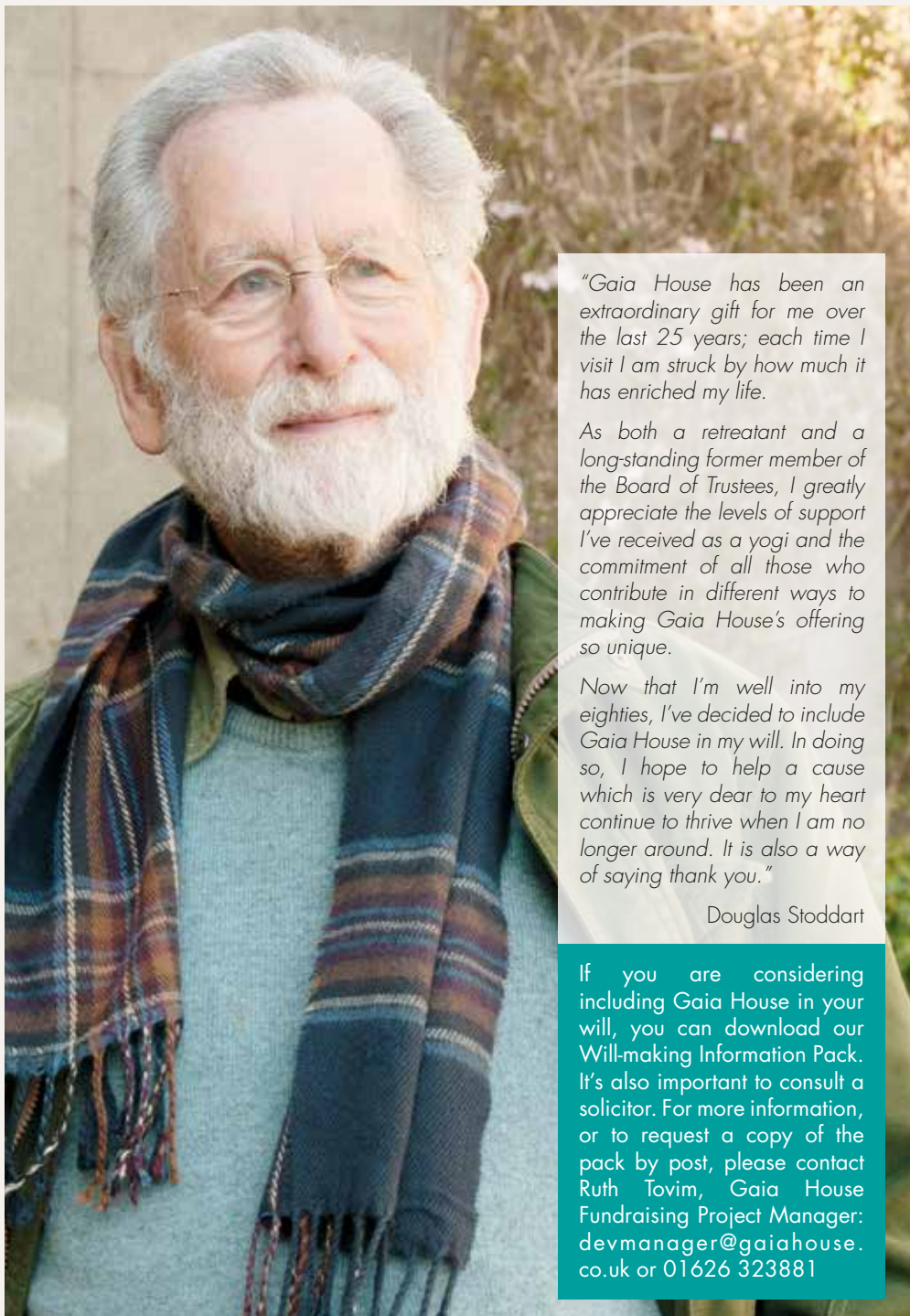
I love the Suttas and I believe they offer excellent practical advice about living in the world, and investigating our 'common humanity'. I'll be working with Anushka Fernandopulle, who is one of the wisest and most compassionate people I know. Together we will bring the Buddha's teachings to Gaia House and the retreat. I'm very honoured and delighted to be teaching at Gaia House, one of the original early Buddhist meditation centres in the West. Thank you for this opportunity.



*"I am so glad to be teaching with my brilliant Dharma friend Bonnie Duran in 2020 at Gaia House! I am also happy for all of you who will get to benefit from her insight, fresh perspective, and deep love of the Dharma."*

Anushka Fernandopulle





*"Gaia House has been an extraordinary gift for me over the last 25 years; each time I visit I am struck by how much it has enriched my life.*

*As both a retreatant and a long-standing former member of the Board of Trustees, I greatly appreciate the levels of support I've received as a yogi and the commitment of all those who contribute in different ways to making Gaia House's offering so unique.*

*Now that I'm well into my eighties, I've decided to include Gaia House in my will. In doing so, I hope to help a cause which is very dear to my heart continue to thrive when I am no longer around. It is also a way of saying thank you."*

Douglass Stoddart

If you are considering including Gaia House in your will, you can download our Will-making Information Pack. It's also important to consult a solicitor. For more information, or to request a copy of the pack by post, please contact Ruth Tovim, Gaia House Fundraising Project Manager: [devmanager@gaiahouse.co.uk](mailto:devmanager@gaiahouse.co.uk) or 01626 323881



## REFLECTIONS FROM A VOLUNTEER

**Mon Ashton**

Two or three days a month I come to Gaia House and spend the day helping to get the house ready for the next group retreat. I usually work in Denbury Wing, cleaning and preparing all the bedrooms and bathrooms – a total of 31 beds and seven bathrooms. My work allows the coordinators and the work yogis to do other essential tasks between group retreats. There is often only a two- or three-day window to prepare the house, and time and resources are limited.

Each room needs to be dusted and hoovered, and I check that lights are working, all bedding is available, the bins are lined and the beds are made up using the legendary 'Gaia House fold'. I try to make each bedroom look as clean and welcoming as possible, within the modest simplicity which is the hallmark of Gaia House, as an offering to the yogis who will inhabit the room, some of whom may be visiting for the first time. I know from my own experience of group retreats that your room is an important part of being in the retreat space.

After many such days working in Denbury Wing, I've become intimate with the peculiarities of each bedroom; the bedspread which needs to be draped to hide the small hole, the bedside cupboard which swings open however many times you try to close it. It's simple physical work which has its own rhythm. On a good day it can feel like an expression of my love for Gaia House, the sangha and even the whole Dharma. Other days, it's just a job that I need to crack on with and get done.

Being a volunteer gives me a continued connection to Gaia House and I like being part of the community. I can contribute, but within the parameters of my everyday life, and my work feels appreciated and necessary. For me, there is satisfaction in seeing Denbury Wing clean and ready for the next influx of yogis. The day of silence and stillness supports my personal practice and the simple physical work slows my busy mind. I usually find time to sit, enjoy the garden, or do some yoga within the day. The hours worked as a volunteer can be accumulated and used as free sitting time on a residential retreat ... and I get a free lunch!





## REFLECTIONS ON A WORK RETREAT

**Ella Titman Tamari**

Recently I had the great practice opportunity of spending three weeks at Gaia House on work retreat. When I participated in group retreats, the work hour at Gaia House was always a rich source of practice opportunities. I grew up in a household where cleaning was the nearest thing to religious practice, but in my life now cleaning always drops to the bottom of the to-do list. During the first few years of coming to Gaia House, I always arrived early to make sure I didn't end up in Household. In over 10 years of repeat Gaia House visits I only cleaned the toilets once.

In the last few years, my practice has focused on exploring vedana (feeling/sensations) in relation to transference and projection, so I felt a work retreat would be a perfect environment for exploring the push that turns vedana into action in the world. When I arrived at Gaia House and learnt I had been assigned to Household, I realised I had struck gold.

My days included four hours of cleaning, an hour of dinner prep and the rest of the day for self-directed practice. I knew from a previous work retreat that I would benefit from having a clear practice plan, so I brought Analayo's *Satipathana Meditation: A Practice Guide* with me to frame the practice aspect of the retreat.

One of my first jobs was to deep-clean the shower room by the meditation hall. I started cleaning at 11am and the next thing I noticed was that it was 12.15pm and I'd spent all the time allocated to cleaning that space scrubbing the cubicle's door with a toothbrush. The next day, when I spoke about it with Karin, the household coordinator, she shared a pearl of wisdom that accompanied me throughout the retreat:

"You have to know when to walk away." This teaching released a lot of angst and I was able to really enjoy cleaning my beloved Gaia House. As my 'I hate cleaning' story turned into an attitude of 'I know how to deep clean and I'm going to put it to good use', the house, as it always does, presented new practice opportunities. It was a very nourishing and empowering retreat.

One of the unique aspects of work retreats is that one is in silence while moving back and forth between the silent retreat space and the talking parts of the house. It was fascinating to experience the two rhythms of the house – as retreatants walked slowly through the narrow corridors, the talking part of the house juggled routine cleaning and cooking jobs with fixing a malfunctioning washing machine, an unexpected storage re-build and the fire alarm going off at 2.30am for no good reason. I am in awe of the coordinators and everybody that works at Gaia House for all their skilful ways of being and the hard work that goes into enabling retreatants to come and immerse themselves in the Dharma. It is an amazing offering, which I am truly grateful for.

## VIGIL FOR THE WILD EARTH

You are warmly invited to join us or support this year's all-night Sangha Vigil at Gaia House on 23rd November 2019. This year we will be dedicating our night together to raising funds for tree planting and re-wilding.

With the multiple planetary crises we are collectively facing in these times, there is an urgent need to give back to our beautiful, suffering earth.

As we come together to sit through the night in vigil, entering the space of our practice wholeheartedly, we will cultivate compassion, courage and a willingness to engage.

Silent practice can be an exquisite, subtle and critically important form of 'activism'. As community we can become stronger, creating a crucible in which the difficult (and beautiful) alchemy of practice can emerge.

There will be alternating periods of sitting and walking and plenty of nourishment for body and soul: poetry, music, a fire and ritual, and guided movement. It will be a beautiful night and we hope you can join us for all or part of it.

You are warmly invited to join us at Gaia House in November. Alternatively, it would be wonderful if you'd like to set up your own parallel vigil with your community of sangha, friends and activists. We can help with suggestions, practicalities and communication – email us at [vigilforthewildearth@gmail.com](mailto:vigilforthewildearth@gmail.com) to register.







## BODHI COLLEGE UPDATE

After four years of offering courses throughout Europe, Bodhi College will soon complete its second round of two-year modular courses (The Committed Practitioner and Secular Dharma programmes). Meanwhile, our Teacher Training programme has just completed its second (of six) modules, and we continue to offer courses on the Buddhist Foundations of Mindfulness and other topics.

This autumn, in collaboration with Tricycle Magazine, the college will offer a six-week online course on Secular Dharma with Martine and Stephen Batchelor.

Also this autumn, John Peacock and Stephen Batchelor will be offering two weekends on Buddhism and Greek philosophy. The first will be Early Buddhism and Hellenistic Philosophy in the Center for Mindfulness in Amsterdam (26-27 October), and the second, entitled A Cure for the Soul: Early Buddhism and the Philosophy of Epicurus, will take place the following weekend at St Luke's Community Centre in London (2-3 November).

To celebrate the work of the teachers, trustees, staff and students of the college, the college will be holding an open day at Goodenough College, London, on 1 December. In addition

to introducing the work of the college to newcomers, the day is also an opportunity for those who have attended our courses to connect with other students and faculty. The day will include a debate on reincarnation as well other offerings including a sitar recital by John Peacock. Everyone is welcome.

Our 2020 programme will be published later this summer. The first course in 2020 will be a 7-day study retreat entitled Contextualising Mindfulness with Christina Feldman, Akincano Weber and Yuka Nakamura, from February 22-29 at Beatenberg Meditation Centre in Switzerland.

Bodhi College's next Secular Dharma programme is scheduled to begin in November 2020, while the next Committed Practitioners' programme will start in the spring of 2021.

For further details on our events, please visit  
[www.bodhi-college.org](http://www.bodhi-college.org)

## SANGHA NEWS

### Regional retreats

**An up to date list of regional retreats is also available on the Gaia House website (under the Courses tab).**

#### BRIGHTON

<b>5 Oct</b>	Yanai Postelnik	<a href="http://www.bodhitreebrighton.org.uk">www.bodhitreebrighton.org.uk</a>
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#### BRISTOL

<b>14 Sep</b>	Jake Dartington	<a href="http://www.bristolmeditation.org.uk">www.bristolmeditation.org.uk</a>
<b>12 Oct</b>	Suvaco	

#### CAMBRIDGE

<b>30 Nov</b>	Catherine McGee	<a href="http://cambridgedayretreats.wordpress.com">cambridgedayretreats.wordpress.com</a>
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#### FROME

<b>15 Sep</b>	Zohar Lavie	<a href="http://www.fromeinsight.weebly.com">www.fromeinsight.weebly.com</a>
<b>24 Nov</b>	Yanai Postelnik	
<b>15 Dec</b>	Martin Aylward	

#### LONDON

See overleaf for listings		<a href="http://www.londoninsight.org">www.londoninsight.org</a>
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#### NORTH EAST

<b>2 &amp; 3 Nov</b>	Kirsten Kratz (non-residential weekend)	<a href="http://insightnortheast.com">insightnortheast.com</a>
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#### OXFORD

<b>21 Sep</b>	Kirsten Kratz	<a href="http://www.oxfordgaiahousetretreats.co.uk">www.oxfordgaiahousetretreats.co.uk</a>
<b>19 Oct</b>	Bhante Bodhidhamma	
<b>23 Nov</b>	Yanai Postelnik	

#### SHEFFIELD

<b>14 &amp; 15 Sep</b>	Ajahn Sucitto (non-residential weekend)	<a href="http://www.sheffieldinsightmeditation.org.uk">www.sheffieldinsightmeditation.org.uk</a>
<b>26 &amp; 27 Oct</b>	Catherine McGee (non-residential weekend)	

# London Insight Meditation – 2019 schedule

**7 Sep**

**Workshop, Jake Dartington**

Cultivating compassion: perspectives from early Buddhist teachings and contemporary mindfulness-based approaches  
St Luke's Community Centre

**21 Sep**

**Meditation day, Ajahn Sucitto**

Love me, love my monkey: self-acceptance  
King Alfred School

**22 Sep**

**Meditation day, Ajahn Sucitto**

Love me, love my monkey: self-acceptance  
(for experienced practitioners)  
King Alfred School

**29 Sep**

**Meditation day, Kirsten Kratz**

Ground, body, breath, space – the art of knowing support  
King Alfred School

**6 Oct**

**Meditation day, Yanai Postelnik**

Re-memembering our life  
King Alfred School

**3 Nov**

**Workshop, Maura Sills**

Depression obscures our natural state of happiness  
Kagyu Samye Dzong

**16 Nov**

**Meditation day, Christina Feldman**

A question of meaning  
King Alfred School

**17 Nov**

**Meditation day, Christina Feldman**

Fabrication and non-fabrication  
King Alfred School

**1 Dec**

**Meditation day, Catherine McGee**

Your body, Buddha's body  
King Alfred School

**15 Dec**

**Meditation day, Zohar Lavie**

Pathways to happiness: cultivating attitudes of practice and living that nourish wellbeing and contentment  
King Alfred School

**Contact details:**

enquiries@londoninsight.org  
07954 472 771  
www.londoninsight.org  
facebook/londoninsight  
Twitter: @londoninsigh

## SanghaSeva

Meditation in action retreats led by  
Zohar Lavie and Nathan Glyde

**16-27 Oct 2019**

**Being peace retreat**

Being the change we wish to see in Israel and Palestine

**1-2 Nov 2019**

**Being peace weekend retreat**

In Israel and Palestine

**23-26 May 2020**

**Humanity in Action: Supporting a safe haven**

Followed by sangha volunteer period  
26-29 May

**2 May, 2020**

**Earth Care Day**

A day of working in Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park; an inner-city jungle in London, UK

**5 Jan – 2 Feb 2021**

**The Way of Compassion**

Volunteering at Anandwan; a leprosy rehabilitation community in India

**For more information visit  
www.sanghaseva.org**

## Barre Center for Buddhist Studies

**Oct – 20 Dec 2019**

**Soulmaking Dharma Online course**

**Catherine McGee**

Explore a new flowering of the Dharma, working contemplatively with desire, emptiness and the imagination, to expand the senses of the sacredness of self, others and world. Application closing date 15 September.

**Visit [www.buddhistinquiry.org](http://www.buddhistinquiry.org)**

## Retreat to Gayles

Eastbourne, East Sussex

**6-8 Dec 2019**

**Awakening inner peace and freedom**

**Yanai Postelnik**

**[www.retreattogayles.co.uk](http://www.retreattogayles.co.uk)**

Please register on the London Insight Meditation website to receive email updates about these and all other events. New events are added regularly.

There is a network of sitting groups in and around London informally linked with London Insight Meditation, including study groups with particular themes. See the website for details.

Teachers offer personal interviews in London throughout the year. Join the mailing list to receive email notifications of forthcoming interview opportunities



## 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](mailto:comms@gaiahouse.co.uk) to inform us of any changes to your group's current information.

### AVON & SOMERSET

**BATH** Bath Buddhist Group  
[suehawkey@googlemail.com](mailto:suehawkey@googlemail.com)

**BRIDGWATER/TAUNTON** Roy Cramer  
[roy.cramer1@virgin.net](mailto:roy.cramer1@virgin.net)

**BRISTOL INSIGHT** Mannie Burn  
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**BRISTOL CHAN** Gordon Adam  
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**BRISTOL** enquiries@bristolchan.co.uk

**FROME** Dan Lupton  
[dan.lupton@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:dan.lupton@hotmail.co.uk)

**MILVERTON** Nicola Belle

**WELLS** Diana Stewart  
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### KENT

**TUNBRIDGE WELLS** John McLane  
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### LONDON

**HAMPSTEAD** Manu Bazzano & Sarita Doveton  
0781 738 2910  
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Please see London Insight website for list of further groups across London  
[www.londoninsight.org](http://www.londoninsight.org)

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## NEW DHARMA RESOURCES

### *Mindfulness: Ancient wisdom meets modern psychology*

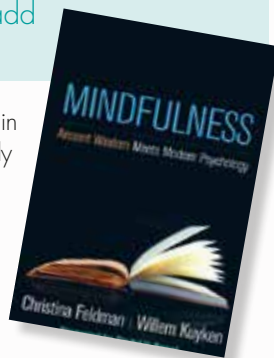
**By Christina Feldman & Willem Kuyken**

How does mindfulness promote psychological well-being? What are its core mechanisms? What value do contemplative practices add to approaches that are already effective?

Exploring mindfulness from its roots in Buddhist psychology to its role in contemporary psychological science, this book provides a uniquely integrative perspective on mindfulness and its applications.

In-depth case examples illustrate how and why mindfulness training can help people move from distress and suffering to resilience and flourishing. Readers are guided to consider mindfulness not only conceptually, but also experientially, through their own journey of mindfulness practice.

Available from Guilford Press and other booksellers.



### *What is this? Ancient questions for modern minds*

**By Martine & Stephen Batchelor**

Bringing together the meditation instructions and Dharma talks given by Martine and Stephen Batchelor during a Son retreat at Gaia House in 2016, *What is this?* takes us through the practice of radical questioning at the heart of the Korean Son Buddhist tradition and suggests how we can benefit from this form of meditation today.

These talks illuminate how a practice that originated in China more than a thousand years ago can now draw on ideas from the natural sciences, ancient and modern western philosophy, Romantic poetry, and the early Buddhism of the Pali canon.

The book can be used both as a practice manual and as a companion in facing the challenge of living a fully human life in the contemporary world.

Available from [www.tuwhiri.nz](http://www.tuwhiri.nz) and other booksellers. Enjoy 20% off with the code GAIA when ordered from Tuwhiri. All proceeds from the book will go to The Tuwhiri Project – a secular Dharma publishing imprint based in New Zealand.



## A RECIPE FROM OUR KITCHEN

With a thick, spongy base and a rich tomato topping, this tasty polenta pizza bake is based on a hand-written recipe of unknown age and provenance from the Gaia House kitchen folder. Feel free to liven it up by adding your favourite pizza toppings – a mix of roasted Mediterranean vegetables works particularly well.

### **Polenta pizza bake**

Serves 4

#### **Base ingredients:**

200 ml milk or unsweetened soya milk

1 tbsp extra virgin olive oil

1 tsp herbs de Provence

2 tsp bouillon powder

Pinch salt

Pinch ground black pepper

220 g polenta

#### **Topping ingredients:**

1 tbsp extra virgin olive oil, plus a little extra for brushing

400 g tinned chopped tomatoes

3 tbsp tomato purée

3 cloves garlic, peeled and crushed

1 tsp dried oregano

Pinch raw cane sugar

Pinch salt

Pinch ground black pepper

200 g grated cheese

#### **Method:**

Preheat the oven to 200c, gas mark 5. Combine all the base ingredients apart from the polenta in a saucepan with 800 ml water and bring to a boil. Pour in the polenta in a steady stream, stirring continuously. Bring back to a boil then reduce to a very low simmer for 5 minutes, stirring often. The polenta should have a thick, porridge-like consistency.

Spoon the base mixture into lightly-greased baking trays to a depth of around 1-2 cm and brush with a little olive oil. Bake the base for 30 - 40 minutes, until it forms a golden brown crust but is still soft and springy to the touch.

Meanwhile, prepare the topping. Fry the garlic in the olive oil for a minute or two. Add the other topping ingredients apart from the cheese and simmer uncovered for 30 - 40 minutes, until it has reduced to a thick paste.

Spread the tomato sauce evenly over the base and top with the grated cheese. Bake for 20 - 30 minutes at 180c, gas mark 4 until the cheese is bubbling and starting to go brown at the edges.





**GAIA HOUSE**  
INSIGHT MEDITATION IN THE BUDDHIST TRADITION

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