



GAIA HOUSE

INSIGHT MEDITATION IN THE BUDDHIST TRADITION

2015
NEWS



WELCOME

Welcome to our 2015 newsletter. We've had a busy and fruitful year at Gaia House, with some important developments which we hope you'll enjoy reading about in the following pages.

Our Co-Directors' office is tucked away at the top of Denbury wing with views over the garden and beyond to Dartmoor, providing an ideal window onto the impermanence of the changeable English weather and passing seasons. Being with impermanence is as much part of life here at Gaia House as elsewhere. Retreatants come and go and each year the programme contains new retreats. Coordinators and non-residential staff, Teacher Council members, trustees and other volunteers are with us for differing lengths of time, offering service as part of their own Dharma practice. Commitment to our own practice as individuals gives us a common ground that sustains us

as we work together. This feels particularly important as Gaia House embarks on a period of development activity.

Over the past couple of years the Trust has been consulting with retreatants, coordinators, non-residential staff and teachers about ways in which we can improve the quality of our accommodation and facilities whilst retaining the retreat environment that is so appreciated by those who come here. We have also taken into account the feedback we've received from people following each retreat.

We have now appointed an architect to draw up a feasibility study and consult with a fundraiser about setting up a capital appeal to cover the costs of any building work that is undertaken. Hopefully, by 2016 we will have a clear plan and be in a position to start fundraising.

Committed to supporting Dharma practice beyond Gaia House, we've also appointed an Outreach Development Officer, Rachel Davies, who says more about our outreach plans on page 8.

Another significant development during 2014/15 which Gaia House welcomes is the creation of the Bodhi Institute, a centre for meditative learning focussing on early Buddhist texts – you can find out more in Stephen Batchelor's article on page 14.

Finally, we'd like to say a big thank you to all those who took part in the online survey within our May e-newsletter. We will continue using our e-newsletters as a way of consulting with our retreatants and keeping you up to date with our development plans and activities.

Diana Parratt & Siggie Streat, Co-Directors

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A TRUSTEE'S VIEWPOINT

One of the delights of becoming a trustee at Gaia House has been the opportunity to get to know the wonderful group of people who work every day to make sure that the house continues to provide its unique and restorative environment. Perhaps like most of us who come on retreat here, I had previously only had the briefest of contact with the team – being welcomed on arrival, helped to understand the work role I had to do, and perhaps being advised on a particular query via the 'note' system.

My experience of the silence, the teachings, meditation sessions, meals, the house and gardens, had been so easy that somehow there was an impression that the place ran itself...but how wrong I was!

Attending Trust meetings gave me the chance to hear about the range of challenges faced by the staff team – and I have been constantly impressed by the commitment, enthusiasm and patience shown by them all. It has been truly inspiring to be part of a group where everyone is doing their best to work together in the spirit of Right Speech & Right Action.

Of course we don't get it right all the time (how could we!), but to be part of a group with this shared intention seems to me to be excellent Dharma practice.

The team and the trustees are working hard to embed the ethos of Gaia House in every aspect of their work, and this includes doing their absolute best to respond to the huge range of different needs of all retreatants. Over time this has inevitably led to some systems becoming a bit unwieldy, so earlier this year Walter Young (another trustee) & I spent a day working with members of the team as they looked to see if they could simplify some of the practical processes of booking and liaison between reception, household and kitchen, teachers, finance, etc. It was a real pleasure to work with them all, and I was again impressed with their determination to tackle the challenges with good humour, kindness and patience.

The peace and tranquillity at Gaia House is only there because of the ongoing efforts of the team to ensure it. I hope that in some small way I can add my contribution to that in my role as trustee.

Sue Wood, Gaia House Trustee



WOULD YOU LIKE TO BECOME A GAIA HOUSE TRUSTEE?

Gaia House trustees are in the process of creating a five-year strategic business plan to enable us to undertake some major developments in response to feedback from retreatants, teachers and staff.

These include improvements to the building, such as increasing the number of single rooms, developing an outreach programme and looking at different fundraising opportunities.

As well as looking for people from a wide range of backgrounds and experience, we would particularly welcome someone who would be keen to focus on the financial aspects of the Trust. Whilst some experience of working with charity finance would be ideal, it's not essential as we offer a tailored induction process.

This is an opportunity to join a committed team of practitioners who work together to share their personal and professional skills in the development of the Dharma offering of Gaia House.

If you are thinking of applying, please call Diana Parratt or Siggie Street (Co-Directors) on 01626 335256 for more information.





INSIGHT MEDITATION PRACTICE

Why are we practising?

Jake Dartington

It's helpful to reflect on why we practise. It can be very nourishing to revisit our underlying motivations and to see the wider context of our practice.

At times, we can become focused on the details of formal meditation practice: being with the breath, turning towards sensations, allowing sounds to come and go. It's also helpful to hold in mind a broad sense of what is meant by 'practice'. The eight-fold path offers a vision of our whole life as an arena of practice. This includes but is not reduced to formal meditations. Our speech, actions and way of earning a living are all integral aspects of cultivating the path. Intentions to bring wisdom and compassion to our work, relationships and way of life are very much part of a broader view of practice that asks 'how do we live in a way that expresses our deepest understandings?'

As our practice deepens, our ideas about why we are doing it also change and evolve. For instance, we may come to see the limitations of seeing our practice as a kind of technical activity, as a predictable journey towards a given goal. Thinking solely in terms of technique implies that we know where we are, where we want to be, and that our 'practice' is a means to a end, a way to get from A to B. Seen in this way, we may feel like a child in a car on a long journey anxiously asking 'are we nearly there yet?'

Often this model of practice implies that there's something about us personally that's not good enough, that needs fixing or improving.

Many contemporary teachings explore the 'inner critic' that underlies this view of practice. Tara Brach's explorations of 'radical acceptance' offer a powerful antidote to this kind of view. When our practice is driven by the inner critic, it's as if we assume that we need to be knocked into shape, and that shameful or unacceptable feelings, thoughts and emotions need to be purged. This is a difficult, painful and seemingly endless way to approach our lives. Even if we sometimes feel it's working – during those times when the unwanted thoughts and feelings are absent – the peace it brings is fragile. Our sense of the practice being successful lasts as long as the unwanted aspects of experience remain absent.

The Zen teacher Barry Magid offers many helpful reflections about our motivations for practice in his book *Ending the Pursuit of Happiness*. At first sight the title may sound pessimistic, appearing to advocate giving up our hopes for well-being and resigning ourselves to unhappiness. However, perhaps the title is an invitation to consider what it would mean to let go of the sense of continually pursuing something, of chasing a sense of completion that always seems as if it's just around the corner. The title, and the book itself, are also encouragements to explore our assumptions about what we mean by 'happiness' that may shape our practice. Dharma practice involves questioning the search for happiness built on

acquiring pleasant things and experiences. It helps us to recognise the futility of trying to gain lasting happiness by building, sustaining and defending a pleasing sense of self. Letting go of this project does not lead to resignation or depression – to settling with unhappiness – but to a deeper sense of flourishing and freedom not bound up with particular conditions.

Barry Magid invites us to question the project of creating an ideal vision of ourselves. "Why are we really meditating?" he asks. "To what extent is our practice driven by 'curative fantasies'?" These are personal myths "that we use to explain what we think is wrong with us and our lives and what we imagine is going to make it better."

One of the 'curative fantasies' we can chase in our meditation is the hope that it will make us invulnerable, to find a state untouched by things that are difficult, unpleasant or challenging. It's interesting to explore whether at times our motivation to practice is informed by a desire for eternal states of bliss in which we become separate from and untouched by the struggles and sufferings of the world around us. We may secretly hope for a state where we float through life, indifferent to environmental and economic crises, unaffected by the loss of loved ones and the pains of human life. It's helpful to let these kinds of wishes be more conscious. We can see that even if such a state were possible it would be a limited way of being: would we really want to be cut off in this way?

In contrast to the 'curative fantasy' of invulnerability, the teacher and activist Joanna Macy teaches that "direct experience of our own deep emotional response can reveal our mutual belonging in the web of life, and free us to act." Our practice then becomes less about feeling safe, distant and detached. Instead it becomes about being in touch with all things. This opens us to a sensitivity that includes painful feelings about the struggles and sufferings of all beings. From this sensitivity we are free to respond creatively and compassionately.

Through our practice, we become less inclined towards searching for pleasant experiences and avoiding the unpleasant. We become more attuned towards being close to each moment, to being touched and engaged.

It's also helpful to revisit our motivations for practising when they have become more limited. Having become tired with our more elaborate fantasies about where practice is taking us, we may simply want to feel a bit less stressed and not to be so reactive to those around us. These are certainly worthy aspirations and seemingly small changes like this can have significant impacts on our lives. However, if our sense of practice becomes reduced to these more modest goals, the beauty and depth of our aspirations can become diminished. Dharma practice points towards a radical transformation in our way of being in the world. While it's helpful to question when our ideas about what this might be simply become another 'curative fantasy', it's also deeply nourishing to stay in touch with the depth and mystery of this aspiration. And so the question 'why are we practising?' is not something to be settled once and for all, fixed and filed away. Rather, the question itself can become central to our practice, inviting an on-going exploration of what it means to be free.





SPREADING OUR WINGS

The outreach adventure

Rachel Davies

What is outreach?

For some time, Gaia House staff and trustees have had an interest in developing something that we are calling 'outreach'. I have recently been appointed to take on this exciting work after many seasons of oiling the Gaia House wheels in the role of Retreat Manager.

In many ways, outreach is responding to the turning of the wheel of Dharma in the West as it gathers momentum. Naturally, the people involved with Gaia House ask the question 'how else can Gaia House support Dharma practice and the deepening of wisdom and compassion?' In our diverse culture, in our modern and complex lives, and as we look for appropriate responses to what our world asks of us, what else can we do at Gaia House that will support this turning of the wheel?

Very generally speaking, outreach is envisioned as offering practice opportunities that are outside of Gaia House's usual remit. Outreach activities are intended to broaden the programme, offer opportunities for people to deepen their practice and explore alternative ways for people to engage with teachings. Very importantly outreach will aim to overcome barriers to participation and promote diversity, offering stepping stones that make coming on retreat at Gaia House feel more accessible to those beyond the existing sangha.

Promoting diversity

We realise more and more that a vibrant and healthy sangha should reflect the community at large, and this means that we find ways to make sure that all people, regardless of race, ethnicity, nationality, disability, age, sexual identity, gender, gender identity, class or religion, feel welcome to participate.

Gaia House trustees are already asking how the issue of diversity should inform the work we do. To further address diversity we are now planning cross-organisational diversity training. This will aim to ask questions such as 'what is diversity?', 'how diverse is our existing sangha?', 'how do we currently promote diversity?'. We will also inquire into views and attitudes held both individually and organisationally which manifest in sometimes very subtle ways, both in terms of how and what we communicate, and what we offer as an organisation. This training will be a springboard from which appropriate responses and action points will emerge, with the intention that all Gaia House activity will genuinely and actively promote a diverse sangha. We will update regularly on how we plan to move forward with this important aspect of our work, so watch this space.

Extending accessibility

One way we're hoping to increase accessibility is through greater use of digital technology. For example, we plan to offer video resources to support both sitting groups and individual practitioners. Video resources will start to form a library of Dharma themes that people can explore systematically or according to their personal interest.

Aware of the wealth of existing online material, we now have an Online Resources page on our website, which we hope will be a great tool, letting people know about innovative and exciting offerings from Gaia House teachers and those in the Insight Meditation tradition. We encourage you to take a look.

Other activities designed to widen accessibility that we already offer are regular meditation evening classes in Newton Abbot and our popular Family Retreat. Both of these are now under the remit of outreach, offering important ways for people to engage with teachings when they have family commitments or there are other reasons why coming to an ordinary retreat isn't currently possible.

Deepening practice and alternative ways of engaging with teachings

A further aspect of our outreach work in the coming year will be to identify 'practitioner pathways' – ways for people to explore teachings and deepen their practice in a more structured way. This may be through creating multi-year programmes to address particular themes or by pointing people, in a more systematic way, to offerings that would be particularly suitable for them. We hope that this will enable practitioners to have a sense of 'going forward' and become more and more confident with practice.

Finally, two exciting new initiatives are underway: firstly, a programme which will explore the relationship between service and practice which we're intending to launch later this year. Participants will liaise with local community organisations and offer service as a volunteer to those who are aging, ill or in the process of dying. In addition, there will be a series of retreats and virtual meetings exploring relevant themes and time spent volunteering in the community will itself become a form of practice. Secondly, in October there will be a residential retreat just outside Oxford, called 'Creating Community, Creating Change: A Climate Change Engagement Retreat'. Please see page 10 for more details.

All of these offerings seek to broaden our Dharma practice horizons and offer new ways to engage with teachings. In doing so we're moving forward with a sense of experimentation and inquiry in response to the growing call for wisdom teachings at this time.



RETREAT IN FOCUS

Creating Community, Creating Change: A Climate Change Engagement Retreat

30 October – 1 November, 2015

Hill End Centre, near Oxford

Kirsten Kratz

Gaia House and Dharma Action Network for Climate Engagement (DANCE) are pleased to announce a residential retreat for those with some experience of meditation who are involved in, or interested in engaging with, the issue of climate change.

As well as offering time in silence for nourishment and reflection through meditative practice, we will also have the opportunity to inquire into how Dharma practice can support and inform our responses to climate change.

Our time together will also be a fantastic opportunity to connect, inspire, support, share ideas and get creative, all within a framework of mindful engagement with each other.

We will live with a spirit of community during the weekend, sharing rooms and preparing some of our carefully-sourced food communally.

We will stay in the comfortable North Dormitory, a secluded corner of Hill End, which is fitted with solar panels and is the most 'green' building on the site.

The retreat will be facilitated by Kirsten Kratz, and will also include some peer facilitation.

Please note: This is not a silent retreat, but will include time in silence. All rooms are shared (and will be single sex rooms).

About the location

Hill End is a beautiful rural education centre set in 62 acres just outside Oxford, catering for different groups of people at various locations throughout the extensive grounds.

Hill End says of their site: "The tranquil quality of our location is a world away from urban life. With no light pollution to obscure the stars, evenings here are particularly special and the stillness of night is only disturbed by the noises of nocturnal animals, birds, and the wind in the trees."

Although there may be other groups on site at the same time as us, the size of the site and the secluded location of the North Dormitory means that we will have the space to fully rest into our time together.

Cost: £85

For more information or to book a place visit www.gaiahouse.co.uk or call 01626 333613.





LEARNING AND TEACHING EVERYDAY BUDDHISM

A farewell to my retreats at
Gaia House

Ken Jones

With the advance of my prostate cancer I am no longer able to continue with my annual retreat programme at Gaia House. I am grateful for this opportunity to explain where I had got to, and to leave behind some kind of record. How to learn, practise and teach Buddhism is as much a personal matter as is our "Buddhism" itself. What follows is an amalgam in which I have gratefully drawn upon others' work as well as my own experience.

Buddhist retreats traditionally consist of a talk by the teacher explaining some concept or practice, perhaps with anecdotal illustrations, and concluding with a question and answer session. The whole will commonly be reinforced by meditation sessions and perhaps one-to-one interviews. However, I believe that these *ideas* need to be more grounded in each student's life experience if they are to become an embodied and effective practice.

On retreats as a first step I invite each student to reflect – on and off the cushion – how the idea (for example "suchness") is, or might be, emotionally experienced in their lives, and particularly in the more discomfiting and grievous episodes. Later in the day, they are invited to share their experience in groups of four or five, the discussion being regulated by a "speaking stone". They also work in pairs in which each takes it in turn always to ask the same question of the other and nothing more. "Tell me, so-and-so, how does it *feel*?"

The feeling refers to whatever of life's discomfures the student is currently deepening in her emotional awareness. Or it may be the more general question "how does it feel to be *you*?" This exercise can sometimes produce striking openings, though much depends on the skill and sensitivity of the questioner. The whole process is reinforced by intensive personal interviews, followed by further individual practice on or off the cushion. It takes place against a background of energetic group physical exercises characterised by awareness of the other and, incidentally, a lot of *fun* and tumbling about. From the first hours of the retreat, I aim to build up a strong sense of fellowship and mutual confidence as an important mutual lubricant.

This kind of teaching appears to have been largely absent from what most Western students receive and I believe has seriously limited the effectiveness of much Buddhist teaching in the West. Contrariwise it is unlikely to work for



most students with an Asian background and education who inhabit a different culture of personal relationship. In the West, however, I suggest that an adhesion to Asian cultural norms has cast a long shadow over what teachers are trying to achieve.

So far I have been concerned with *methods* of learning and teaching, spelt out in more detail on my website www.kenjoneszen.com in a paper entitled 'New Departures in Dharma Teaching and Practice'. The content is an "Everyday Buddhism" about which there is now substantial literature and is focussed upon an emotional awareness-in-the-body of the ups and downs of everyday life. This has been characterised as transforming the straw of the discomfures of the needy self into the gold of compassion and wisdom, founded on a deepening sense of the "suchness" of phenomena. Increasingly I have emphasised some appreciation of our "authentic self" as already present and potentially ripening from the start of the practice, rather than some kind of struggle from delusion to enlightenment. By the end of a retreat I would hope that most students might have some sense of being fundamentally okay and that "all manner of things shall be well".

A certain buoyancy of spirit and compassionate warmth begins to emerge in what has become a little community and this is attested by the whole atmosphere of the retreat in startling contrast to the first day, in the closing interviews and in subsequent correspondence about the event as truly life changing.

This trajectory of practice I have traced out on my website as a kind of do-it-yourself manual, complete with exercises. This I find fits comfortably enough into a five-day retreat, provided that participants have studied the website manual in advance. The Zen slant is a reflection of my own practice, particularly inspired by the thirteenth century master Eihei Dogen. In my experience, however, the retreats have proved hospitable not only to most Buddhist traditions but also to other inner path spiritualities, notably in Christianity, Judaism, and Sufism.

I suggest that Gaia House has the potential, on several counts, to become the UK centre for the study of and communication about how we teach the Dharma. Certainly teaching at Gaia House has been for me one of life's truly rewarding experiences.



BODHI INSTITUTE

Early Buddhist teaching for a secular age

Stephen Batchelor



The Bodhi Institute is a new educational initiative, designed to provide in-depth courses in the study and practice of Early Buddhism – i.e. the canonical teachings of the Buddha found in the discourses (Sutta) before they became codified into the doctrines of any Buddhist school. The founding faculty members are Stephen Batchelor, Christina Feldman, John Peacock and Akincano Weber, all of whom are well-known teachers at Gaia House. Over the past two years they have been working together to refine the vision of the Institute and develop its curriculum. The Bodhi Institute will start offering courses from the beginning of 2016.

The Institute is committed to a middle way of human awakening that integrates theory with practice, while encouraging both personal fulfilment and social engagement. To this end, it will offer a programme of courses to enable students to access the rich and often untapped resources of the early Buddhist source texts and acquire the skills to understand them in ways that can be applied to contemporary needs. The Bodhi Institute aspires to recover core insights of Early Buddhism in order to develop fresh ways of understanding the Buddha's teaching today. While making use of modern critical scholarship, its goals are not exclusively academic. It seeks to provide a contemplative education that inspires students to realise the ethical and philosophical values of the Dharma in the context of this modern age.

Since 2009, the founding faculty and others have been running a two-year, module-based study course called the Committed Dharma

Practitioners Programme (CDPP) at Gaia House and Sharpham House in Devon. From the outset these courses have been oversubscribed. The Bodhi Institute will continue running this course as well as offering a two-year programme in the emergent field of Secular Dharma, and another two-year programme for professionals who utilise Mindfulness-based Interventions in their work. In addition, several weeklong residential courses on early Buddhist discourses and Buddhist psychology will be provided. These will all take place at different venues in the United Kingdom (including Gaia House and Sharpham) as well as at other locations in Germany, Italy and Switzerland.

Having observed at first hand the growth of interest in Buddhist thought, psychology and meditation over the past forty years, the members of the faculty have witnessed a steady development in the literature, retreat centres and Buddhist communities (both monastic and lay) that serve this interest. Now that the practice of mindfulness is becoming widespread in healthcare, schools and businesses, its relevance has extended far beyond the world of Buddhism. The Bodhi Institute is keenly alert to the possibilities raised by these conditions and seeks to address them as wisely and appropriately as it can.

In addition to the founding faculty, other teachers at Bodhi Institute in 2016 will be Bhikkhu Anālayo, Letizia Baglioni, Martine Batchelor, Chris Cullen, Renate Seifarth, Maura Sills, Ajahn Sucitto, and Jenny Wilks.

For more information about the Institute, visit: www.bodhi-institute.org

We plan to be open for bookings by the beginning of September 2015.

COORDINATOR ROUND-UP



Left to right, back: Rupert Marques, Ramiro Ortega, Parvati, Mark Lorenzi
Left to right, front: Elena De Paz, Harula Ladd, Nadine Wills, Maia Tooke

Since our last newsletter we have many new faces in the Coordinator team. Parvati, who will be completing her two-year period of service in September, has been joined by Elena de Paz in Reception.

Ramiro Ortega has returned to offer his second period of service following an early departure by Karen Sivan who is now caring for her mother. Ramiro is working in the Household department once more with Maia Tooke, making sure that the house is safe, clean and ready for retreatants.

Nadine Wills and Harula Ladd are busy in the kitchen making sure all of our visitors are enjoying nutritious, wholesome meals. The kitchen is supplied by our organic vegetable garden where on most days you will find Rupert Marques tending the plants and fruit trees.

Mark Lorenzi is making sure we are well taken care of as he attends to all the maintenance issues in the house.

There have been some tearful goodbyes to Pete Hooker, Joanna Oughton, Virginia Kennard and Jane Knight. A huge thank you to each of you!

The coming months will see more change in many of the departments. With each coordinator giving a period of service of up to two years, the recruitment process is ongoing at Gaia House. Find out more about being a coordinator on page 16. For further information and an application pack visit the 'Working Here' section of our website. You are also welcome to call our HR Manager Sarah Abdy on 01626 323881 or email admin@gaiahouse.co.uk if you have any questions.



RESIDENTIAL COORDINATOR VACANCIES

A unique opportunity to explore mindfulness, service and meditation within the framework of daily life

Joining our Residential Coordinator community can be an incredibly special experience. Working together with the teachers to offer a safe, nurturing retreat environment, the coordinators are the bedrock of Gaia House.

The opportunity to experience work, practice and community can provide a rich base on which to grow your practice and learn more about combining practice with everyday life. In addition to receiving a stipend and regular time off, the coordinators have a fortnightly 90-minute Dharma discussion meeting facilitated by one of the Gaia House teachers. This is an opportunity to engage with teachings in a structured and collaborative way, explore themes according to personal interest and develop confidence with practice – things which we consider to be essential in maintaining the wellbeing of the residential community at Gaia House.

We offer positions in kitchen, garden, household, maintenance and reception and as all positions are for a maximum of two years, positions become available on a regular basis. Please visit our website for current opportunities and if you have any questions you can contact our HR Manager, Sarah Abdy, on 01626 323881 or admin@gaiahouse.co.uk

“Becoming a coordinator has changed my life. It has been an incredible opportunity to explore what service and life in community means. Here I've felt not only part of a team, but part of a much bigger project: that of the awakening and flourishing of all human beings. It's been a real privilege to be part of this.”

Ramiro Ortega, Household Coordinator

COMMUNITY DHARMA LEADERS TRAINING PROGRAMME

Catherine McGee, Jenny Wilks and Yanai Postelnik, on behalf of the Gaia House Teacher Council

The Gaia House Teacher Council is very pleased to be launching a Community Dharma Leader (CDL) training programme in the UK.

Interest in Insight Meditation and Dharma practice has grown steadily over the three decades since we began running retreats at Gaia House. For a number of years, many local groups have regularly run sitting days and other activities around the country. We are aware of a real desire and need for more locally-based support for practitioners in their daily lives. In response to this need, we will be offering training to a number of senior Dharma students to enable them to offer service to their local sangha.

Participants will be nominated by a core group of Gaia House Insight Meditation Teachers, who will also mentor them throughout the programme. The training will support these senior students to share their love and knowledge of Dharma with both new and established

practitioners, and to provide facilitation and leadership functions where needed.

On completing their training, CDLs will be authorised by the Gaia House Teacher Council to offer basic instruction in meditation and Dharma. This will include classes and day-long retreats in their locality or community and they will begin to offer this during their training. We are confident that their service will be a valuable support for ongoing and deepening Dharma practice outside of retreats, and where access to Dharma teachers is limited.

The CDL training programme is being offered in the spirit of dana: inviting a mutuality of generosity, and will depend upon support from participants and the sanghas they will serve.

May this CDL programme be of service to our Dharma communities and for the benefit of all beings.





A VOLUNTEER'S PERSPECTIVE

Dharma in the digital age

Terri Hartman

As a volunteer, I have the wonderful opportunity of spending approximately two days a month in the beautiful and tranquil environment of Gaia House. Having been on a couple of retreats here over the years, I was really pleased to have been accepted for the Archive Digitising Project which I began working on back in November 2014.

I had been looking for a volunteer opportunity on and off since moving down to Devon in 2009 but had struggled to find something that offered the flexibility my very irregular availability requires. Running a small hotel in Torbay means that my schedule is very unpredictable as it depends entirely upon the comings and goings of the guests – which is never consistent. It's also a very physical job which requires a lot of interaction with people. So, as well as needing something that could accommodate my erratic availability, I was very much hoping to find a fulfilling project that offered a break from my day-to-day activities.

Digitising the Dharma talks has proven to be much more than I could have hoped for. The peaceful atmosphere and energy of the house itself and the stunning gardens in which it sits provide a most welcome sense of tranquillity each time I arrive. It's like going on a short work-retreat every time. And as if that weren't reward enough, I get lunch on the days I volunteer – which is always a treat! And I'm able to exchange my accumulated volunteer time towards participation in a group retreat.

The primary aim of the digitising project is to preserve the large archive of Dharma talks that were given at Gaia House during the years of cassette recording, a very perishable format. Once transferred to digital format, all the talks will continue to be available in the Library for retreatants. Preserving the richness of the archive is a very worthwhile project in and of itself, but I find it even more satisfying to know that a large number of these talks will be uploaded onto the wonderful website that is dharmaseed.org – making them freely available worldwide.

The task of digitising itself, while it might sound tedious to many, offers me the occasion to simply slow down. The project consists of first converting the talk from its cassette format to a digital one. This is actually the really simple part in that a machine does it for me! All I have to do at this stage is type in the speaker's name and talk title and then push a button. Some 10 minutes later, the talk is on the computer and ready for editing. While the machine is doing its bit, I'm able to work on one of the other talks already uploaded, or I'll occasionally take the opportunity to have a little mini meditation session.



I've also discovered that a short walk around the front garden takes just about the same time as it does for one tape to digitise.

The editing process is more time-consuming and can take anywhere from five to thirty minutes depending on the quality of the recording. It's also the more interesting stage as it gives me a chance to hear what I call little 'Dharma bites'. I can't tell you how many times I've been tempted to just sit there and listen to an entire talk! Instead, I make a note of the speaker and talk, knowing that I'll very soon be able to access it on the web or get it from the Library.

Using a computer programme specifically designed for such editing, it's primarily a question of cleaning up the beginning and

end of the talks – a necessity which may only be understandable to those of you who remember the days of cassettes! Otherwise, the sound quality is checked at intermittent stages. Any especially loud sound (usually a cough or sneeze) shows up as a big line in the sound graphic so can be cut out as needed and the programme enables other sound issues to be dealt with. There are just a few talks that have been unsalvageable as the quality was simply too poor.

Once edited, the talks are filed for the Library Archive and, as mentioned, some are then uploaded onto the internet. So, if you're not able to make it to Gaia House any time soon, you'll nonetheless be able to enjoy the richness of the Dharma!



AN AUTUMNAL REFLECTION

The garden at Gaia House

Rupert Marques

It is late autumn, and I have just returned from the walled vegetable garden, with an apple in my pocket. The sun has finally appeared after days of absence and the garden is awash in a pale yellow light from the low morning sun. Insects are dancing above the raised garden beds in the newfound warmth, there are dewdrops hanging like jewels on the tips of the apple trees, to which are attached the last few remaining apples of the year. Chard and kale stand bravely, amongst the few remaining edible plants outdoors; other beds are bare, covered with fresh compost. Inside the shelter of the poly-tunnels salad greens persist in their slow winter-like growth, offering at least something fresh from the garden each day.

The old walled garden at Gaia House has been in use from the 18th century. Today it serves as a source of locally grown organic food for retreatants and the residential community here, as well as a quiet sanctuary in which to contemplate. The garden and grounds, and the rolling fields surrounding Gaia House that stretch to the wilder moors on the horizon all invite a remembrance of the wider sensuous world to which we belong. They are reminders, in the words of farmer Wendell Berry of how much time one may live 'inattentive to wonders'. The sharp taste of a freshly picked apple, the rich colours and textures of fallen autumn leaves, the shrill call of a robin close by, the pale green lacy filigree of moss dangling from a yew all collaborate in renewing our membership with the wider ecological community.

The garden as well as the zafu offers a close mirror for life, particularly evident in the land's changing face throughout the year. Soon the season will turn toward the stillness of winter, the frost will turn the mornings white and so much of what stands alive now will fall away, yielding and becoming compost to the life-giving soil. In spring new growth blossoms of its own accord, and yet there remains the intentional choice of what will be sown and then cultivated and what will not. The exuberance of summer will unfold with gifts in such diversity: slender pods of peas and beans, bulging orange, green and yellow squashes, an abundance of lettuce and oriental greens, plump raspberries, apples and pears expanding in girth, juicy soft tomatoes. All have their place in making up what we call garden. And then a return to autumn, and the harvest of what was sown and ripened through the coming together and participation of so many conditions, so many beings, in order that life may continue to touch its own face.

This morning, sitting on the bench by the small pond by the north wall, embracing the warmth from this soft sun, I am reflecting that the garden here at Gaia House is a place where it is possible to receive life. Certainly the fruits and vegetables offer up their bodies so that our own may be nurtured, yet there is also something so utterly ordinary that is offered, and yet so often overlooked. The apple tree does not say a word.



BOOK REVIEW

Seeing That Frees by Rob Burbea

Mark Ovland

Mark Ovland spent two years serving Gaia House as a reception coordinator in 2011-13. He teaches mindfulness in a number of settings, including prisons and leads short retreats at Sharpham House. Mark is also a trustee of Freely Given Retreats and a founding member of DANCE.



Every once in a while I experience a work of art so exceptional that it stops me dead in my tracks. Perhaps it's the dazzlingly intricate texture of a Baroque fugue, or the luminous and exquisite detail of a Vermeer oil painting – something or other of genius from some bygone era.

But most recently it has been a thoroughly modern masterpiece that has caused my arrest: the profundity and singular brilliance of Rob Burbea's *Seeing That Frees*.

I am really not aware of any Dharma book quite like it. Each time I travel through its pages they fill me with an ever-deepening sense of awe and wonder. What Rob has achieved in this work is astounding, a result of his many years of dynamic and indefatigably searching personal practice and a tutoring of many hundreds of students.

The scope of the book extends far beyond its subtitle – *Meditations on Emptiness and Dependent Arising*. For this is not simply a

compendium of meditations, nor just a treatise on Emptiness. What lies within is nothing less than a pioneering vision, a remarkably integrated and novel way of understanding the whole of the Dharma. Showing how the tenet of Emptiness has been basic to the Buddhist path since the Pali Canon, whilst offering more than fifty detailed meditations to practically realise its truths, Rob presents a unified and comprehensive rendering of the entire journey to awakening.

A word of reassurance: the less experienced meditator may well feel intimidated scanning the later pages of this fairly weighty tome, but it would be mistaken to think the book is for advanced practitioners only. Whatever one's background Rob leaves no one behind as he compassionately guides each reader through carefully crafted expositions and practices.

The ideas within may be philosophical and erudite but the tone of his written word is full of ease and tender understanding. With lightness, humour and piercing clarity Rob makes the most profound subjects impressively accessible.



WAITING LISTS AT GAIA HOUSE



As many of you are aware, most of our group retreats run at full capacity and we run waiting lists for places that become available.

We take time and care to ensure that we manage our waiting lists so that as many people as possible can attend our retreats. We sometimes find ourselves with up to 50 people on a waiting list and trying to work our way through the list in order to offer places is both complex and time-consuming.

Until now, adding people to waiting lists has been done manually. To ensure we can continue to offer the best service to those wishing to commit to a waiting list place, we are changing the way we operate this important part of our booking process.

From 1 August 2015 we will be asking for a non-refundable registration fee of £1 to join a waiting list. Asking you for a token payment means that your name can be entered automatically into our system, helping us to administer waiting lists efficiently and fairly. The new process will enable you to fill in more information relevant to the

retreat you wish to attend and you will receive important information about our single room and food policies as well as the terms and conditions of any subsequent retreat place offered. If you are offered a place, and take it up, the £1 fee will be deducted from the cost of your retreat.

If you join a waiting list, we kindly ask you to keep the relevant dates free. If your plans change, please contact us so that we can remove you from the waiting list. This helps us to keep the waiting list up to date with names of people who can take up places if they become available.

Once you have joined a waiting list, the chances of being offered a place are fairly good. When you find that a retreat you wish to attend is fully booked, we encourage you to join the waiting list, if you are in a position to commit to coming should you be offered a place.

COMING SOON...

Embodying the Awakened Heart

16 - 24 October, 2015

Yanai Postelnik and Leela Sarti

At the heart of the Buddha's teachings is the real possibility of awakening: our innate potential to discover inner peace and freedom, and to embody the unobstructed openness that is our deepest truth.

This retreat will explore the art of Insight Meditation as an invitation to be authentic with our experience, to relax into an intimate relationship with the depth of our being, and to cultivate a genuine kind-heartedness towards ourselves and all of life.

In learning to trust our life we can come to abide in the wide-open heart of awakened presence.

There will be full meditation instructions, talks, LovingKindness practice and regular meetings with the Teachers.

To book visit the Gaia House website or call 01626 333613.

2016 retreat programme

We are delighted to have a rich and varied retreat programme lined up for next year, which we look forward to sharing with you soon.

A full list of our 2016 retreats, together with a description of each retreat, will be available on our website from 1 November 2015.

If you have been on retreat at Gaia House within the last three years you will automatically receive a copy of the programme in the post (unless you have asked us not to send you paper mailings).

We will be taking bookings for next year's retreats from 1 November 2015 and look forward to welcoming many of you back to Gaia House in 2016.

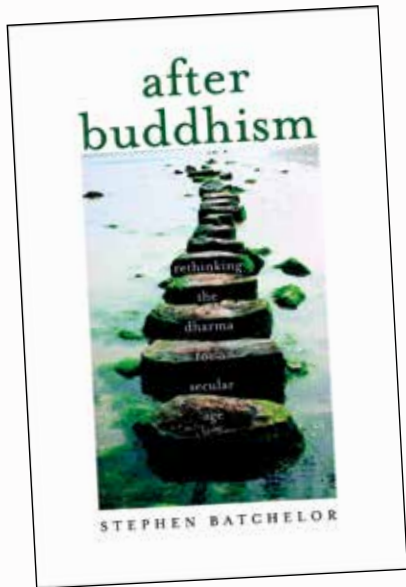


COMING SOON...

After Buddhism by Stephen Batchelor

"A daring and reasoned work of remarkable scope, vision, scholarship and promise."

Jon Kabat-Zinn



After Buddhism: Rethinking the Dharma for a Secular Age is an attempt to synthesise Stephen's forty years of Buddhist study and practice in the Tibetan, Sōn and Theravāda traditions.

The chapters of the book alternate between critical readings of the core ideas of Buddhist thought as found in the earliest texts of the canon and narrative accounts of five of the Buddha's inner circle of followers. This approach allows for the emergence of a thematic understanding of those teachings of the Dharma that do not

appear to be derived from the pre-existing context of Indian culture, while elaborating a portrait of the historical Buddha through his dialogues and interactions with key figures of his time and place in north-east India during the 5th century BCE.

Central to this project is a new interpretation of the foundational Buddhist doctrine of the Four Noble Truths. Stephen argues that this doctrine may have originated as a series of tasks to be practised rather than a set of truth-claims to be believed. In recovering these earliest strata of Buddhist tradition, he seeks to establish a basis on which to rethink the Dharma in a language that addresses the concerns of our time.

After Buddhism will be published by Yale University Press on October 27, 2015 in North America, and on January 16, 2016 in the UK.

The Faith to Doubt

The 25th anniversary edition of Stephen's book on his experiences of Sōn Buddhism in South Korea has recently been republished by Counterpoint Press. Out of print for a number of years, this edition has been updated with a new preface and afterword.



Stephen Batchelor

SANGHA NEWS

Let's face this together!

One Earth Sangha

EcoSattva Training – responding to global climate disruption

13 September –
15 November, 2015

An eight-week online interactive training course exploring our capacity to effectively engage on climate change and other ecological challenges with mindfulness, wisdom, courage and compassion. With Joanna Macy, rev angel Kyodo Williams, Thanissara, Catherine McGee and others.

To register visit www.oneearthsangha.org

Gayles Retreat Centre

The Heart of Wisdom and Compassion

11-13 December, 2015

Yanai Postelnik

A silent meditation retreat including sitting, walking and standing meditations, Dharma teachings, meetings with the teacher and instructions on bringing awareness to every part of our experience. Suitable for beginners and experienced meditation practitioners.

Cost: £130

Tel: 07721 023 845

info@retreattogayles.co.uk

www.retreattogayles.co.uk

Dartmoor Summer Walking and Meditation Retreat

29 July - 2 August, 2016

Yanai Postelnik

A special opportunity to cultivate mindfulness and practise 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, sitting in meditation, and spending time around the campfire and in nature.

Yanai Postelnik has spent substantial periods walking in wilderness environments and has led walking retreats over many years in the French Pyrenees and in the Negev desert in Israel.

Previous experience of Insight Meditation and silent retreats will be beneficial, but is not required. There will be extended walks in a range of landscapes, including remote areas, so some degree of physical fitness will enhance your experience.

Gidleigh Village Hall offers secluded camping, with a spacious heated hall for meditation, toilets, a shower and a catering kitchen. Nutritious vegetarian meals will be provided.

Cost: £130

For more information or to book, contact Faith Burch:

walkingretreat@gmail.com

07952 157 585

Regional retreats

BRIGHTON

5 Sept 2015 / Leigh Brasington
12 Dec 2015 / Ajahn (Sister) Metta
21 Feb 2016 / Tree planting

Contact:

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

Please check the website for additions to the 2015/16 programme.

BRISTOL

31 Oct 2015 / Yanai Postelnik
21 Nov 2015 / Bhante Bodhidhamma
27 Feb 2016 / Chris Cullen
17 Apr 2016 / Martine Batchelor

Venue: St Michaels on the Mount Parish Hall, St Michaels on the Mount School, Old Park Hill, off Perry Road, Bristol BS2 8BE

Contact: julia.wallond@yahoo.com

<http://www.bristolmeditation.org.uk/day-retreats/>

CAMBRIDGE

19 Sept 2015 / Caroline Jones
7 Nov 2015 / Catherine McGee
5 Dec 2015 / Rob Burbea
20 Feb 2016 / Martine Batchelor
30 Apr 2016 / Yanai Postelnik

Venue: Friends Meeting House, 12 Jesus Lane, Cambridge, CB5 8BA

Contact: cambridgeinsight@gmail.com
<https://cambridgedayretreats.wordpress.com/>

MILTON KEYNES

Yoga and meditation weekends with Helen Stephenson and Dr David Brown

The Well, Newport Road, MK15 9AA

29 Jul - 2 Aug 2015

2-3 Jan 2016

Crewe Oblate Centre, CW2 8JS

1-3 Apr 2016

Contact: info@mindfulnessmk.com
www.mindfulnessmk.com

OXFORD

26 Sept 2015 / Jaya Rudgard
24 Oct 2015 / Bhante Bodhidhamma
28 Nov 2015 / Chris Cullen
30 Jan 2016 / Rob Burbea
12 Mar 2016 / Catherine McGee
16 Apr 2016 / Kirsten Kratz
21 May 2016 / Chris Cullen

Venue: Headington Parish Hall

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

Cost: £10 (£5 concessions)

Contact: Brigid or David / 01608811940
www.oxfordgaiahouseretreats.co.uk

SHEFFIELD

12-13 Sept / SanghaSeva non-residential retreat with Zohar Lavie

17 Oct / Training Day for sitting group facilitators with Jake Dartington

31 Oct / Sangha Saturday

14 Nov / Jake Dartington

30 Dec - 1 Jan / New Year non-residential retreat - teacher TBC

9-10 April 2016 / Non-residential weekend with Rob Burbea

Contact: River Wolton / 07748 271 470
www.sheffieldinsightmeditation.org.uk

Sanghaseva retreats

Meditation in action retreats led by Zohar Lavie and Nathan Glyde
www.sanghaseva.org

UK

Earth Care Day

23 August 2015, Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park, London

A day spent outdoors, working gently with the earth as an expression of our hearts, framed by periods of meditation. Conservation work will include weeding, pruning, brambling, habitat creation and path repairing. No previous experience required.

Interconnection Weekend

12-13 September 2015, Sheffield

A non-residential weekend retreat, combining outdoor activity with silent spiritual reflection.

Day one: Silent meditation practice / Day two: Conservation work with a local Sheffield organisation.

It is possible to join both days or just one day of your choice.

ISRAEL

Being Peace Retreat

11-22 October, 2015

A retreat aimed at bringing compassion and an openness of heart and mind to this place of conflict. We will spend time in both Palestine and Israel, meeting Palestinians and Israelis whose lives are directly affected by the conflict. We will work alongside Palestinian farmers harvesting olives on contested land. There will be silent days of meditation and group meetings exploring our experience.

9-10 October, 2015

A shorter offering of the above.

INDIA

Anandwan, Maharashtra

Somnath Silent Meditation Retreat

13-21 December, 2015

Work Retreat

23 December, 2015 - 13 January, 2016

Anandwan is a vibrant and inspiring community, comprising cured leprosy patients and people with disabilities. These retreats are an opportunity to open to joy and sorrow, seeing where and how they meet, and to share care and love in different ways.

Dharmalaya, Himalayan foothills

Silent Meditation Retreat

17-25 March, 2016

Work Retreat

26 March - 5 April, 2016

Dharmalaya is a charitable organisation dedicated to bringing together sustainable development and spiritual growth. This is an opportunity to live in a community and help create a centre of connection and positivity. On the work retreat we will be participating in the creation of food gardens, permaculture landscaping and earth building.

Aug 21 2015

Evening
Thanissara & Kittisaro
Listening to the heart - engaged Dharma for our times
Jamyang Buddhist Centre
£ 17

Aug 23 2015

Earth Care Day
Zohar Lavie & Nathan Glyde
Joint Sanghaseva/London Insight event.
Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park
£ 12

Sep 6 2015

Meditation day
Leigh Brasington
The Jhanas (the meditative absorptions)
King Alfred School
£ 17

Sep 14 2015

Six-week course
Caroline Jones
An introduction to Insight Meditation: bringing mindfulness and kindness to life.
St Luke's Community Centre
£ 70

Sep 20 2015

Meditation day
Ajahn Metta
Living with uncertainty - the play of impermanence
King Alfred School
£ 17

Oct 3 2015

Meditation day
Kirsten Kratz
The beauty of belonging
Jamyang Buddhist Centre
£ 20

Oct 25 2015

Meditation day
Bhante Bodhidhamma
If there's no self, who gets the karma?
King Alfred School
£ 17

Oct 30 2015

Evening
Stephen Batchelor, John Peacock and Akincano. Early Buddhism: Theory and Practice
Friends House (Euston)
£ 20

Nov 14 2015

Meditation day
Christina Feldman
Dimensions of insight
King Alfred School
£ 17

Nov 15 2015

Meditation day
Christina Feldman
Dimensions of insight
King Alfred School
£ 17

Nov 21 2015

John Peacock & Chris Cullen
Mindfulness of the mind
Friends House (Euston)
£ 25

Nov 26 2015

Evening
Paul Burrows
Beginners' evening
Wesley Hotel (formerly MIC)
£ 10

Dec 6 2015

Meditation day
Rob Burbea
King Alfred School
£ 17

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 notification of forthcoming interview opportunities.

Contact details:

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

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.

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suehawkey@googlemail.com

BRIDGWATER/TAUNTON Roy Cramer
roy.cramer1@virgin.net

BRISTOL INSIGHT Julia Wallond
julia.wallond@yahoo.com

0117 908 0494 Gordon Adam
gordonadam@blueyonder.com

BRISTOL CHAN enquires@bristolchan.co.uk
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