



GAIA HOUSE

INSIGHT MEDITATION IN THE BUDDHIST TRADITION

2017  
NEWS



# WELCOME

Welcome to our 2017 newsletter!

We hope you enjoy reading about the latest developments at Gaia House and hearing from different people from across our vibrant sangha. If you are interested in contributing to our 2018 newsletter please email Hannah on [comms@gaiahouse.co.uk](mailto:comms@gaiahouse.co.uk)

First a word from each of our Directors: Devin Ashwood, who's been in post for almost a year now, and Siggie Street, to whom we're sadly saying goodbye.



Reflecting back on my first year, I feel grateful to have had Siggie's experience and wisdom to support me into this new role. Those of you coming to Gaia House year after year may find comfort in the predictability of a centre that is always available in

a form you have come to rely on. But all is change and so we change with our supporting conditions, and I am now working with the wonderful team here to make arrangements for the next stage of Gaia House's evolution. We've got used to adjusting to changes in the staff team that supports you behind the scenes; this has been going on from our earliest days, but Siggie and her co-director Diana, who retired at the end of last year, brought a period of particular harmony and stability to the smooth running of Gaia House. As a new team configures itself, we hope to build on the warm foundations established by Siggie and Diana, to nurture the biggest development to Gaia House's building since 1967, when the nuns who lived here built the Garden Wing.

This newsletter introduces a bold fundraising initiative and building plan that will help us to service the huge increase in demand that we now regularly attempt to meet. We believe our plans will make a significant improvement to your experience at Gaia House, both practically and aesthetically, as well as improve the accessibility of our centre. I hope you support our ideas to develop the building and feel inspired to contribute, in whatever way you are able, to help sustain the Dharma offered at Gaia House, now and into the future.

**Devin Ashwood**  
Finance and Development Director



This autumn I will have been at Gaia House for over five years, and it has been such a joyous and enriching period of giving service and facilitating the core activities here.

Reflecting earlier this year on entering my sixth decade in life and sensing an internal shift, I made the decision to retire this autumn.

Going with the change, this feels like the right time for Gaia House and for me to embrace this shift.

It's been a delight having Devin on board and I have thoroughly enjoyed working with him and our dedicated team of volunteers, coordinators and non-residential staff – a real blessing.

It feels wonderful being able to leave with a sense of all being well, and I am really appreciating how Devin and the team continue serving in the spirit that they do.

The beauty of working collaboratively manifests in a constant effort to maintain the unique place that Gaia House has developed into. Little by little, tasks are accomplished that hopefully improve the experience of being in this silent retreat environment and support the Dharma teachings that we love and which are at the heart of Gaia House.

In my role of Operations Director it has been a joy to compile the retreat programme for 2018 with both new and well-established teachers coming to teach at Gaia House. Preparations for our 2019 programme are also under way, and include a period for building development work that hopefully will serve way into the future.

There is sadness and gladness in my heart, which is brimming with gratitude!

Yours in the Dharma,

**Siggie Street**  
Operations Director

# CONTENTS

## Regular articles

An update from the Trust	4
Teacher Council news	5
Insight Meditation practice	6-8
Coordinator reflection	14-15
A volunteer perspective	19
Sangha news	36-39
Sitting groups	40-41

## Features in this edition

The launch of our Building Appeal	10-13
A retreatant perspective	17
Southsea Sangha: Everyday Dharma	24-25
Recipes from our kitchen	32-35

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## AN UPDATE FROM THE TRUST

**Kate Malleson & Sue Wood**



In the spirit of co-operation and shared working that permeates Gaia House, we have been sharing the role of Chair of the Trust since Michael Jeffries passed the baton on to us last year. We are extremely grateful to him for all the important work he has contributed as Chair for so many years, and really value the opportunity to give what we can to Gaia House. We are delighted to be working together in the role, as we feel our skills and experience complement each other well, and we really appreciate being a part of such a committed and generous group of Trustees.

This has been a busy year, tinged with sadness when Diana left, but we were delighted to welcome Devin to Gaia House and to see him settling so quickly into his new role. Following Siggis decision to also take her well-deserved retirement, we are now taking time to collect views from all members of the team to help us shape our next steps.

We have also been busy working alongside teachers, directors and staff as we considered all the views and ideas about improving the fabric of Gaia House and ensuring it is fit for the future. The plans that have emerged are now definitely taking shape, and we are enthusiastic about the potential of adding more single rooms as well as improving vital toilet and shower facilities. Fundraising is now underway and we will all be doing what we can to ensure its success.

We have also been busy recruiting more trustees to take the place of those who have left, and we have been delighted to welcome Adrian

Weekes, who has brought valuable skills and experience to add to the team. Trustee recruitment has continued, and we now have a further three potential trustees who will soon begin their gradual introduction as part of the process of becoming approved as trustees. If you are interested in joining the Trust, there is likely to be another recruitment drive soon, so do look out for more information.

Gaia House is able to create its unique and restorative environment through the contributions of many different groups and individuals, each bringing valuable skills, talents and experiences. Trustees work alongside teachers, staff, coordinators and volunteers, and we share respect and gratitude for everyone's contributions, with our shared commitment to the Dharma providing a precious and strong foundation for good working relationships. We look forward to working with you all in the year ahead.



## TEACHER COUNCIL NEWS

**Kirsten Kratz**

Although I've been a part of the Teacher Council for more than two years now, I still often feel like a greenhorn trying to get to grips with the at times baffling complexities that make Gaia House the wonderful and unique vessel for contemplation, inquiry and transformation that it is. Time and again I see that, though the vessel may have its flaws and imperfections, it is shaped by a shared intention and a great deal of good will, generosity, and wholehearted commitment.

It is very good news that after over a year and a half of absence due to his illness, Rob Burbea was able to join the recent Teacher Council meetings and the annual Teacher-Trust meeting. Wonderful to know that Rob is currently free of cancer. Long may it last!

This summer we were very happy to welcome Yuka Nakamura for a three-week residency in June, and Letizia Baglioni for six weeks in July/August. During their time in the house Yuka and Letizia offered their skills and guidance to personal and work retreatants and to the group of residential coordinators. Their presence certainly enriched Gaia House and it was wonderful to share with them the delights of witnessing, supporting, and accompanying committed practitioners on their journey of deep exploration.

With regard to the group retreat programme, in recent discussions between the Teacher Council and the Trust we agreed that we would like Gaia House to focus more on offering longer retreats. At the same time, we very much hope to more actively support short residential and non-residential retreats in other parts of the country, making retreats more accessible to those for whom



the journey to Devon is lengthy or expensive. In recent years residential weekend retreats led by Gaia House teachers have been organised by Sheffield Insight Meditation in South Yorkshire, and Retreat to Gayles in East Sussex. In 2018 we hope to add a retreat in North East England.

On a related note, a detailed report by Peter Gingold, one of the trustees, carefully examined Gaia House's greenhouse gas emissions and discovered that travel of retreatants, teachers and staff to Gaia House made by far the largest contribution to emissions. Based on Peter's painstaking report, teachers, trustees and staff discussed ways to further reduce Gaia House's carbon footprint, and a whole range of creative ideas emerged, to be explored in the coming months. We will keep you posted.

Finally, the Teacher Council is very happy to hear that the first participants of the CDL (Community Dharma Leaders) programme are completing their training, and we look forward to their contributions, which we are sure will support, enrich, and empower their local sanghas in many wonderful ways.



# INSIGHT MEDITATION PRACTICE

Five Dharma lessons learned from shutting down the UK's largest open cast coal mine

Suvaco

Inspired by last year's mass direct action with climate action network Reclaim The Power, here are five lessons I learned that inspired me to offer my three-part retreat series *The Courage to Care*.

## 1. Being true to Dharma sometimes means breaking the law

In May 2016 I joined approximately 350 other people to commit the civil offence of trespassing on private property by entering the Ffos-y-Fran coal mine in South Wales. Our intention was to halt operations and shut down 'business as usual'. The protest, which was organized by *Reclaim the Power*, was part of a day of worldwide protests targeting the dirty fossil fuel industry directly.

Like many other Dharma practitioners I am aware of the dire times we are currently living in. Political change is slow, too slow, and there are multiple, deepening global crises at play, including a planetary state of emergency. Vested corporate interests set a spanner in the wheels of any meaningful climate legislation, and when I think about this and feel into my body there are feelings of guilt, anger and disempowerment. As Thomas Merton, the Trappist monk, said when looking at the social changes taking place while he was in a monastery: "I am a guilty bystander in a world of change."

Like many, when I sit in meditation it is possible to observe and let go of unwholesome thoughts and tendencies. At moments to know beyond doubt the experience of the feeling of separate self-sense dissolve into a non-localised open field where words are too small and where the sense

of belonging in the universe feels unquestionable. Words like gratitude, blessing or grace pervade the texture of this field of freedom. These moments where I know from my depths I am but the continuity of this living seamless whole; I am part of this earth, *I am this earth*. Yet in my culturally conditioned shapings I return from times on the cushion to a life of separation feeling that something is significantly amiss. The heart calls forth to follow with conviction these insights, in this case even if it means breaking the written law. After all, throughout history civil disobedience has time and time again proven to cause significant social change in the face of oppression - used by the suffragettes to bring voting rights for women, and by the civil rights movement after years of fighting in the courts to end institutionalized segregation.

To protect the future of our planet, our health, countless delicate species and ecosystems, as well as our communities and the rights of future generations I feel that taking direct action as *upaya* - skillful means - is never more urgently needed than now. The science is clear - a safe climate is only achievable if fossil fuels stay in the ground.

## 2. The heart of ordinary people comes forth when empowered

Beyond the occupation itself, the activist camp was in and of itself an incredible experience, established in a field next to the mine three days before the day of action began. People camped around a large windmill erected to provide energy, and a kitchen tent provided nourishing and very tasty vegan meals on *dana*. There was even a silent well-being tent where I could retire and meditate and always found other meditators sitting. All participants were made co-responsible for running the camp. No one was in charge because we were all in charge. It was heartening to witness the dedication, the care, the love and the generosity that ensued, and connections quickly developed between the people who had gathered. Twice a day the entire camp would meet as a group and skillful facilitation would ensure that decisions were made effectively by consensus.

Every possible aspect of the operation was mapped out with care; health and safety, legal aid, team-building, all the way down to food provisions for the day. It was touching to see how much care was put into making sure everyone was heard, how concerns could always be voiced safely. Even when we were down the mine - in the intensity of the day of action itself - there was still a sense of care to ensure that challenging decisions could be taken swiftly. However, the most remarkable and uplifting experience for me was the people themselves. The helpfulness and kindness I witnessed was equal to that offered in any monastery or meditation centre. From the long washing-up rounds when people volunteered outside in the rain and bitter cold, to

the quick construction of ramps across the grass to ensure accessibility for a person in a wheelchair, there were many gestures of basic goodness I witnessed over those days that touched me to the core. Perhaps it is an assumption that there are only 'certain types of people' who come to these kind of events. Not so. In the mine I spoke to pensioners, housewives, the local fisherman, a plumber, a university professor, a lawyer, a doctor, a child therapist and even a House of Commons policy adviser, and of course lots of students and young people. At the camp were mums, dads and children as people of all backgrounds were brought together.

## 3. A mine is a mine is a mine

The writer and activist Wendell Berry says 'There are no unsacred places; there are only sacred places and desecrated places'. This sentiment hit me hard when I first caught sight of the vastness of the Ffos-y-Fran coal mine. There is something profoundly disturbing about visiting such a devastated landscape; it brought forth a similar feeling to the one I had the first time I visited an abattoir as a twelve year old. The direct experience of seeing with my own eyes that the meat in the wrapping in the supermarket had an embodied, emotional history made a lasting impression. Once you smell the adrenalin, see the fear, and hear the cries of the animals, you never forget. It was a similarly jolting experience descending into the mine. The silent shock on first witnessing the scale of the destruction ripples through the senses - a barren, grey, desolate wound accentuated by the contrast of the surrounding lush green Welsh landscape and gentle rolling hills. Once in the mine, one doesn't so much as walk, but slides through thick rivulets of gunky black mud.



Then it hits you. There's absolutely nothing living there. It's just a black terraced hole, and at the bottom there are these immense diggers, trucks and cranes. They look like oversized toys left behind by oversized children. It was a surreal sight, and yet what came to mind as I looked around at the assembled protestors – all of us dressed in our red boiler-suits – was an image of the Mad Hatter's party in Alice in Wonderland. For despite the devastation, the natural response to strengthen the human heart and build both the resilience and courage required to take action, was to play. Games were improvised, small performances enacted, huge inflatable cubes thrown around, someone appeared with a small sound-system of music on a backpack, a game of football began, and as it began raining a group of us crammed under a digger for a pop-up rave.

#### 4. Direct action matters

A cynical voice inside says "What does it matter that production was stopped for only a day? What long-term difference will it make?"

Over the years one way in which I have tried to assuage my feelings of guilt for being a bystander – for merely 'bearing witness' – to the environmental catastrophe - has been through renunciation. It has not worked. It was what I knew from my years as a Buddhist monk. My carbon footprint is very low. I stopped flying almost a decade ago. I do not own a car. I never shop beyond absolute basics. I recycle and experiment with living on donations and different share economy schemes. Despite these measures, global fossil fuel extraction and production continues to soar. As do levels of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. As far as I know there is still no international law limiting the ever-voracious appetite of the growth economy. True, last year at the UN climate conference in Paris an agreement was finally reached to curb emissions, but it was not binding - and the aviation industry was not included. Therefore, the largest mine occupation in English history becomes more than just a symbolic act. It strikes directly at the industry, and the economy.

On a personal level, it also has significant impact. This is because our self-view still comes from a deeply individualized sense of self that is the core of the very problem. Doing 'my bit' for the environment – be that through recycling, ethical shopping – is both crucial and necessary, but if it ends there then there is a risk that a subtle kind of self-congratulatory view arises, one which helps make me feel like 'I'm good', and the other is 'bad'. Perhaps this excessive self view, the subtle but pervasive sense of objectifying ourselves, gets reborn as a consumer - only an ethical 'green' one. That very identification still stems from a profound disconnect.

By taking direct action and standing in that mine I felt a muted sadness – not for the land, but with the land. I witnessed it and received a silent acknowledgment from the land, a thank you for seeing me, and in that meeting I belonged. To go beyond the atomized self and feel part of a larger human family - this strange tribe who gathered, cutting across gender, age, background and identity - was both rare and precious. During those days I could trust a stranger, I felt that if anything happened I would be taken care of, as I would care in return. These were the unseen gifts from the land back to us.

#### 5. Activism is following your conscience

On reading this you might notice an impulse to follow your heart's desire to also respond, but then let this be overridden with doubts that you're too busy, too old or don't know where to begin. This may be accompanied by feelings of overwhelm, anger or grief. Be vigilant for what you are diminishing is *citta* – the pure heart – itself. Let your curiosity listen to your conscience and see what your body tells you. Be curious; what makes you feel that you connect and feel you belong off the cushion? In splitting ourselves off we sever something unsettling but absolutely necessary – the deep grief the earth feels from our separation to our greater body, and to ourselves.

For more information visit:  
<https://reclaimthepower.org.uk/>

## RETREATS IN DECEMBER



Whether or not you celebrate Christmas, it's hard to completely avoid the so-called 'pre-Christmas madness'. The run up to the festive period can be a fruitful time to step out of our usual routine and take stock. Equally, a period of calm over New Year can be a welcome chance to prepare for the year ahead and tune into our deepest intentions.

Our carbon-neutral, wood-fuelled heating system ensures all rooms are toasty throughout the winter, and many find the lounge particularly cosy. It's always a delight to come back into the warmth of the house after a mindful walk in the fresh winter air appreciating the beautiful grounds and local countryside.

#### Below is a list of this year's December retreats:

2 Dec	<b>Meditation Day</b> - Moving into Stillness: Embodied Mindfulness – with Jenny Wilks
7-10 Dec	<b>A Path of Peace and Kindness</b> – with Yanai Postelnik
15-19 Dec	<b>Remembering and Awakening the Heart's Potential</b> – with Kirsten Kratz and Chris Cullen
28 Dec – 3 Jan	<b>New Year Retreat</b> – with Kirsten Kratz, Paul Burrows and Suvaco

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



**Devin Ashwood**



As many of you know, over the last two years Gaia House trustees and directors have been working with architects, heritage advisors, ecologists and the local council planning team to explore how best to make our centre fit for the 21st century, and enable us to meet the emerging and future demands placed on us.

Our unique location in West Oghwell has a long history as a place of spiritual refuge, going back to the founding of the 13th-century church, a Grade 1 listed building. The oldest part of our building dates back to 1588, and the house and grounds still echo with the work and lives of the nuns who resided here for half a century before us. Our community joins many generations of people who have cared for this place over the centuries and we are honoured to be responsible for the site's continued preservation and development.

Since being founded in 1983, Gaia House has earned an international reputation as one of the world's leading Insight Meditation retreat centres. Among the things that make us unique are our beautiful location and the breadth and richness of our annual programme. The fact that Gaia House is not tied solely to any one Buddhist tradition brings a quality of openness and celebrates diversity.

This inclusiveness has proved to be a popular quality, with the demand for what Gaia House offers increasing significantly over the last 20 years.

However, we are now faced with the challenge of our facilities being stretched to the limit.

Since we moved to West Oghwell in 1996, there have been no major structural improvements



made to the building. In fact, the house remains pretty much the same as it did 50 years ago, with the last major upgrade in 1967 when the Garden Wing was built. In its days as a convent, the building housed a maximum of 45 nuns at any one time. Today, we regularly find ourselves at full capacity accommodating 90 people!

Retreatant feedback consistently highlights the need for more toilets and showers, and more single rooms. We currently have just one room available for wheelchair users, and the location of our offices in the main building makes it difficult to run Gaia House without causing disruption to retreats. Furthermore, we are currently unable to offer resident teacher accommodation that feels appropriate for the level of commitment to Gaia House that this role contributes.



Images showing the addition of the Meditation Hall (chapel) in 1955, the Hermitage Wing extension in 1960



## How we propose to improve Gaia House

To address the challenges that we are experiencing, we wish to embark on a transformational building development project which will enable us to maximise the effectiveness of Gaia House's work, and enhance our ability to fulfil our mission and be more accessible to a greater range of people.

Stage 1 of our plan is to convert the garages at the back of the house and construct a bathroom link adjoining the Garden Wing. This will enable us to improve facilities for group retreatants by:

- Doubling the number of single rooms we can offer from 10 to 20
- Increasing the number of showers available full time from 7 to 12
- Doubling the number of toilets available full time from 9 to 19

In addition, we will be able to:

- Create an additional ground-floor single bedroom and bathroom for wheelchair users
- Improve our coordinator accommodation
- Create a self-contained resident teacher living area
- Move our offices outside of the main house so that they cease to be disruptive of the retreat space

The aim of these plans is not to increase our capacity but to provide a better environment for all those who visit, reside and work at Gaia House.

Construction work for Stage 1 is scheduled to take place during the latter half of 2019, with retreats being offered off-site during this period.

If we are successful in achieving funding for Stage 1, a second stage plan will:

- Refurbish the Garden Wing and transform it into a new Hermitage
- Sensitively deliver a modest renovation of the entire retreat space, which has not been modernised in 20 years



Conversion of the garages at the back of the house



Construction of a bathroom link adjoining the Garden Wing

- Replace the Garden Wing windows, doors, floors and roof
- Construct an outdoor walking area

There is no doubt that we are living through complex and challenging times, and it seems more urgent than ever to continue providing access to teachings and practices which support the development of awareness, calm, kindness, compassion and generosity.

There is certainly enough evidence that what



If you are considering making a major gift, we'd love to speak with you about the ways in which we'd like to use your contribution. Please contact Devin to arrange a convenient time to speak: [dev.director@gaiahouse.co.uk](mailto:dev.director@gaiahouse.co.uk) / 01626 323881.

Gaia House offers is needed in today's world. Every year now, more than a 1,000 people access the life-enhancing experience of a retreat at Gaia House.

Enclosed with this newsletter is a letter asking for your help in ensuring that we can continue to deliver Gaia House's transformative work now and into the future.

The total cost of our Stage 1 improvements is £1.3 million, £450,000 of which has already been raised. We are grateful to everyone who has contributed towards this and your help is now needed to raise the remaining £850,000 by September 2018.

**We ask you to support our Building Appeal as generously as you are able, whether through donations or fundraising activities, and we extend heartfelt gratitude for your generosity and help.**

**To make a secure online donation or get ideas for fundraising activities, please visit our website: [www.gaiahouse.co.uk/building-appeal/](http://www.gaiahouse.co.uk/building-appeal/)**

**Cheques can be made out to Gaia House Trust and posted to: Gaia House Building Appeal, Gaia House, West Ogwell, Devon, TQ12 6EW.**

**Thank you!**

As well as reaching out to our sangha, we will also be applying for funding from grant-making trusts and foundations. If you work for or know people who work for or are involved with trusts or companies that might be able to make donations to our appeal, please email Michelle, on [financemanager@gaiahouse.co.uk](mailto:financemanager@gaiahouse.co.uk) and we will follow this up. It is so important that we explore every angle to help realise our plans, and we would be delighted if you could let us know of any individuals or organisations that might be able to help us.



## SPRINGTIME MUSINGS OF A COORDINATOR

**Anne Cockcroft, Reception Coordinator**

Gaia House is such a beautiful place to be in spring, so many spaces to rest and sit in a chorus of bird song, a myriad of greenery and brilliant splashes of colour; sun streams through the wild and the tame; the snowdrops and daffodils have faded to make way for primroses, blossom, and the promise of bluebells.

It still feels like a blessed time, eight months into my role as a residential coordinator at the house. The rhythms of life seem to allow a chance to follow the seasons and watch a year unfold, precious time away from the stresses of my life as a primary school teacher. It was with some reluctance that I welcomed the spring; I have loved the comforting hibernation of winter and noticed a subtle wish to stop time and stay in this safe enclosed space. The oriental plane tree and I have become acquainted, when I touch the low curved arm of its branches; it shakes my hand and receives me, in its low timbered roots.

I came here at the end of summer to begin my period of service as maintenance coordinator, and then in February I moved from a maintenance role to reception. In my life back in Suffolk, I had been aware of a strong inner prompting and a need to make some changes, as if needing to create a larger space to contain the inner process of change that I had begun. Gaia House seems like a precious container to explore these inner worlds and to feel and see how the internal interfaces with the outer world; to see how relationships and expression within interactions unfold and are changed and

affected by the internal and external processes; it all seems interlinked, a complex web. My desire to change and move was inspired by a need to find a place, a community, people, that echo my beliefs and nurture a new and fragile change in my perception and understanding of the world. I am enjoying a greater sense of belonging, more connection, a kind of shared journeying. Time falls into its own quiet rhythm here and it has been possible to somehow find space to take stock of my life and dip my toes into the depths of the retreat space between the busyness of climbing ladders and painting doors, responding to emails and booking people on to retreats.

Giving service as a maintenance coordinator invited me to care for and develop a relationship with the house, and it felt, although slightly out of my comfort zone, good to stretch and respond to the challenge of the practical problems and the physical needs of the building. It was such a rewarding and necessary role; when things fall back into place, objects get repaired and problems get solved, there is a great sense of flow and satisfaction. In Reception, in the world of people, interaction and communication, I feel on more familiar ground and the nature of

the challenges change for me. Reception can be a very busy place, and I am learning to step between the needs of people who want attention, the ringing phone and the relentless inbox of the computer. It can feel like everyone wants your help at the same time and it seems to be about bringing the patience of stillness, a kind of presence to each thing, one step at a time and not racing ahead or falling into a kind of overwhelm. I am learning about my tendency to jump ahead into planning and organising and noticing a habit of perceiving the needs of others and overlooking the needs of myself. When I bring myself and my needs more fully to meet the work and the person being met, noticing and holding an awareness of both, it seems to help. It is good, for a time,

to take a breath from the roles I have been clothed in, in my life; primary school teacher, mother, grandmother, partner, and I hope this time here will enhance those roles that endure. I find Gaia House to be a welcoming and safe home for a time; a good space to find oneself.

Sitting in the unlit lounge after dusk on a clear night, embraced by the soft dark, the stars shine out their presence, exclaiming their wonder at it all.

The house seems to hold its past and its future amidst the present, enabling whispered memories of times past in the inner and outer, the personal and the impersonal, to become known.







## DIVERSITY

### An update

Rachel Davies



Understanding that our journey toward true inclusivity includes learning, we started 2017 with training for our Diversity Working Group led by our Diversity Consultants, Sandhya Dave and Dave Samuels. It was a great step in our learning around what diversity means, and how Gaia House can be more inclusive.

This year we also started asking people arriving on retreat to fill out an optional and anonymous Inclusion and Diversity Questionnaire. Thanks to all those who have filled this out so far. We have been collating the information retreat-by-retreat, and helpful information is emerging which shows us which retreats attract more diverse populations, and also helps us to understand where we are right now in terms of diversity. In relation to national averages (and Gaia House is a centre which serves the whole of the UK and beyond!) we can see a pattern of under-representation of:

- people from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities
- people who are lower-earning
- people with a disability or health condition

Our next steps will include analysing the data in order to understand what it means for Gaia House and what we offer, ascertaining what would

be reasonable aims for Gaia House in terms of diversity, and then working with our Diversity Working Group, the Trustees and Teacher Council to find long-term strategies for dismantling barriers to participation in light of our aims. Understanding the complex nature of barriers to participation is crucial. Further steps we have taken so far include:

- Creating space on our group retreat feedback form for people to feedback on their experience of inclusivity at Gaia House
- Working with Sandhya, our Diversity Consultant, to provide a half-day meditation session for people from BME backgrounds
- Holding a stall at Exeter's Respect Festival – a diversity festival with the strapline 'All Different – All Equal' – where we met lots of people interested in what Gaia House offers
- Starting a review of our communications, including moving away from directing people toward only a binary choice of male/female when asked about gender as part of our booking process, and assessing how accessible our website is.
- Finally, we are also in the process of developing an Inclusion and Diversity Policy – a necessary foundation from which we hope that further positive change can emerge.

**For updates on our work in this area, please look under the 'About Us' tab on our website, where you will see a page about inclusion and diversity.**

**Please contact Rachel on outreach@gaiahouse.co.uk if you would like to discuss this aspect of our work, or offer feedback.**



## A RETREATANT PERSPECTIVE

Eileen Palmer

I first came to Gaia House for a seven-day silent retreat in 2011. At that time, I was a busy consultant in palliative care.

I had successfully completed a Masters programme in mindfulness at the University of Oxford (with distinction) and was just beginning my D. Phil researching mindfulness and compassion in end-of-life care. With my three children away and building their own lives, I felt that this was close to the heart of what I wanted to be doing with the rest of my life.

Between 2012 and 2013 I experienced three unrelated serious illnesses. The third one was life-changing. I was left initially unable to walk more than ten yards and I was virtually housebound for the first year.

Since 2013 I have become an ever more regular visitor to Gaia House, usually for seven-day retreats. In November 2016 I came for two weeks. Most recently, I came for ten days in March 2017. I bring the wheelchair and the rolling walker, along with the various other medical bits and pieces now needed to care for this body.

Each retreat has been different, but important elements remain constant. The welcome here is so warm and open....from the teachers and also from the coordinators and volunteers who together weave the whole experience. The teachers, in my experience, are simply outstanding. I am not a Buddhist, (I follow a Sufi path) but find myself deeply touched and

changed again and again by the depth, wisdom and clarity of the teachings offered. There is no requirement I can see to be an "anything" apart from a human being willing to practise: to sit and walk in silence. The silence of the house and grounds is like liquid peace. I feel it pour into my heart, into my bones when I come back. Beneath the simplicity and silence lies a living active compassion. When I was asked whether I found any aspects of the house difficult with my disability by one of the resident teachers, everything I mentioned was substantially improved when I returned four months later. Someone wipes down the leaves of each house plant several times a week. Used envelopes are cut up to re-use as notepaper.

All these things, and many more, big and small, touch my heart and linger.

I have just finished reading a book by Marion Partington called *If you sit very still*.

In it, she quotes a line of poetry by her (murdered) sister Lucy, which reads "If you sit very still, you can hear the sun move".

At Gaia house, if you sit very still you can hear the sun move, the earth turn and the blessed birds sing all day long. And slowly, mysteriously, without any effort, life changes.



## FRIENDS OF GAIA HOUSE

### An update

**Hannah Seyfert**

The response to the launch of the Friends of Gaia House last year has been very encouraging, and we'd like to say a big thank you to everyone who has expressed their support for Gaia House in this way.

The Friends initiative feels like a real acknowledgement of the sense of belonging that people feel in relation to Gaia House, and it is both heartening and inspiring to see the link with those who feel part of our sangha being strengthened.

Since launching the Friends last year, those who have joined have had the opportunity to take part in our Building Development Open Day, and offer feedback on our ideas for re-configuring the Dining Room to make it more spacious and comfortable.

The feedback we've received from the Friends on our development and improvement activities has been invaluable. We're also very

pleased to have recruited one of the Friends to participate in our Diversity Working Group, which has been initiated to help promote inclusion and diversity at Gaia House (you can read more about this work on page 16).

If you are interested in becoming a more 'official' partner in our commitment to enhancing health and well-being through meditation, please feel welcome to join the Friends.

We've no doubt that the initiative will continue to be a channel for service to the sangha, for the benefit of all beings.

**To find out more, or to join the Friends, please visit [www.gaiahouse.co.uk/gaia-house-friends/](http://www.gaiahouse.co.uk/gaia-house-friends/) or call Hannah on 01626 323887.**

*"My connection with Gaia House started in 2015 when I attended a three-day retreat which coincided with a period of illness. Being on retreat made what I had been reading in books on Buddhism feel real and relevant, rather than just theoretical and interesting. I decided to join the Friends of Gaia House following a life-changing retreat last year, which inspired me to bring about some very practical and positive changes in my life, including becoming a committed vegan. Joining the Friends was part of this, as I wanted to demonstrate my support for an organisation which I feel benefits the planet and its inhabitants." Rob Howells*



## A VOLUNTEER PERSPECTIVE

**Susan Jordan**

I've been coming on retreat to Gaia House for many years, starting in the old Denbury days, and during that time I've come to see the house and its beautiful grounds as a spiritual home, a place where I feel supported in my practice and part of a community of like-minded people.

I've been enormously grateful for all that the coordinators, office staff and volunteers do to create an atmosphere where the Dharma can be lived and practised.

When I moved to Devon from London in 2011 I was pleased to find myself living not far away. Once I was settled in my new home I decided to offer some kind of practical help, both to express my appreciation and to keep in touch with the goodness and dedication to practice that I've valued so much. Initially I worked in the garden, enjoying the quiet company of plants and soil and trees, but after a period of severe back pain I chose to do something lighter and joined the team of household volunteers. For well over two years my job has been to clean the Teachers' Wing between retreats.

The job is relatively self-contained and the tasks I do have now become familiar. There is a certain pleasure in the familiarity, and in making sure the rooms are as clean and orderly as they can possibly be. I sometimes notice feelings of surprise or irritation if I think things have been left in a mess, or satisfaction and approval if all is tidy. Despite these feelings, I'm always aware that what I bring to the job is my own state of mind and body. Working away quietly on my own for a period of three

hours or so, I have the opportunity – perhaps the luxury – to be with whatever is going on for me, and to see it more clearly than I would amid the distractions of everyday life. I also have the opportunity to bring mindfulness to the work itself and my reactions to it. Even if I don't always have time to stay for a sitting afterwards, I regard my volunteer job as a worthwhile period of practice.

As a volunteer I've always felt well looked after. It's good to be able to join the rest of the community for meals, whether I choose to eat in silence or talk with the coordinators, staff and other volunteers. Although that's not my reason for doing it, it's also good to know that my work is appreciated by everybody in the team. And it's good to be a part, however small, of the Gaia House sangha, and to feel welcome and comfortable whenever I come on retreat, as though I'm returning home again.





# BODHI COLLEGE

An update

Stephen Batchelor

Bodhi College is now coming to the end of its first cycle of two-year courses. Around sixty students have been attending the Committed Practitioners and the Secular Dharma programmes, both of which will conclude at the end of this year.

Both courses will start another two-year cycle in the spring of 2018. These are aimed at those with an established meditation practice and a commitment to leading a life based on the values of the Dharma, who wish to

broaden their understanding through an exploration of early Buddhist doctrine, philosophy, psychology and ethics. Applications for the next cycle of courses open in September 2017.

### Still to come this year are:

**4 September – 15 October** **The Four Noble Truths** – with Stephen Batchelor, Christina Feldman, John Peacock and Akincano Weber  
A six-week online course with the core faculty of the college in collaboration with Tricycle: the Buddhist Review.

**2-6 October** **Universal Empathy** – with Christina Feldman and John Peacock at Sharpham, Devon. A week-long retreat for mindfulness teachers.

There will also be two weekend seminars at Goodenough College, London:

**28-29 October** **Philosophy as a Way of Life, the Buddha, Sceptics, Epicureans and Stoics** – with Stephen Batchelor and John Peacock, exploring the striking parallels between the practices and interpretations of Hellenistic philosophy and early Buddhist teachings.

**9-10 December** **Untangling the Tangle** – with Christina Feldman and John Peacock, focusing on the Honeyball Sutta, in which the Buddha explores how our world of experience is constructed moment to moment, and how such understanding leads to the ending of distress and fabrication.

As a European venture, Bodhi College has also organised courses this year in Switzerland, Italy and Germany. It intends to expand its activities in continental Europe in 2018 by running the Committed Practitioners Programme in Holland.

**To join our mailing list, contact one of our staff, and find further details on our forthcoming events, go to: [www.bodhi-college.org](http://www.bodhi-college.org)**



# A WORK RETREAT REFLECTION

Theo Young

Having done several group retreats, I was looking forward to trying the mysterious 'Work retreat'. What will that be like?

How will practice integrate with work, tasks, movement, responsibilities? What will be learnt? Moreover, the time has finally come for me to transition, beyond the safety nets of educational institutions, into independence and responsibility. This has provided fuel for a tremendous amount of anxiety... Could the work retreat provide the stable ground for investigation?

And so, with the flame of curiosity ignited, I gladly ventured once again to Gaia House. That this sanctuary exists is something I am deeply grateful for. The joy of immersion; the relief of sensitivity; the honouring of solitude. The opportunity for deep listening, exploration and understanding in times of such confusion. All of this and more. Such a delight.

One of the things that most surprised me about my time on work retreat was the ample amount of time there was for sitting practice, despite the five hours of work required each day. I found my practice ebbing into new depths, and was able to really explore and open into certain areas of the Dharma that I have been intent on investigating. Not only this, but the transition from sitting to applying myself to the various tasks of 'kitchen yogi' felt wonderfully fluid. In fact, I found the time spent working just as valuable a time for practice and insight, with different situations and opportunities for practice opening up.

Being a work retreatant didn't come without its challenges though. The elements of responsibility, time pressure and physical strain were encountered each day, along with the inevitability, and making, of mistakes. However, I would say that I found the challenges of being on work retreat one of the main benefits, and I found it a good practice for experimenting with different ways of seeing that felt helpful and playful. This also helped me gain priceless insight into my anxieties around working life, which was an absolute relief!

I must also mention the coordinators, how helpful they were, and how fun it was to be around them each day. It really brought so much joy and ease to each work period to be around a team of such dedicated and kind-hearted beings. It was also, as always, a delight and an honour to be in the presence of the Gaia House teachers, and I relished every encounter.

For anybody interested in going on work retreat, I keenly recommend it. When I left, it felt like I had made new friends, had lots of fun, and learnt so many things that have changed this life in wondrous ways.

# GAIA HOUSE IN 2016

- 2016 was a leap year, so our doors were open for **366 days**
- **38** group retreats were attended by **1,689** individuals
- **412** people came on personal retreat for a total of **4,464** nights
- **30** out of 39 group retreats ran a waiting list



- Financial Assistance and Bursaries (FAB) Fund grants totalling **£47,470** enabled **349** people to come on retreat
- **100%** of applicants to our FAB Fund received support to come on retreat – that's everybody who applied, meaning nobody was turned away



We reclaimed  
**£8,339**  
in Gift Aid from HMRC



In excess of  
**1,400**  
volunteer hours were contributed

## Who came to sit?

- **9%** were under the age of 30 years
- **37%** had never been to Gaia House before
- **17%** received some form of financial assistance



## Income

Retreat bookings	£511,502
Donations (FAB + General Fund)	£107,637
Other	£29,060
<b>Total operating income</b>	<b>£648,199</b>

## Expenditure

Programme delivery	£626,203
Governance	£10,109
<b>Total operating expenditure</b>	<b>£636,312</b>





## SOUTHSEA SANGHA: EVERYDAY DHARMA

**Daniel Sutton-Johanson**

In May 2014, I was given a key to a space, a reduced rental rate for a fixed period and a whole sack full of fear, doubt, anxiety and uncertainty.

If ever I needed my practice, this was definitely the time! I had been encouraged (and gently prodded) by several US and UK-based teachers I knew to venture out to my own growing edge and check out the possibility of creating a local community which could act as a refuge for those on the same path as me. At this point I had been practising for around a decade without any sangha on my doorstep. My communities existed in Devon, France and Los Angeles. I was interested in meditation, experiential inquiry and the radical ideas and practices of the Buddha...maybe there were some others living on the UK's only island city who were seeking something similar?

I decided to do something I never really considered before, and that was to fully embrace the real possibility of failure and simultaneously publicly come out as a Buddhist. As someone who had an awareness and a sense of not really fitting into the stereotypical shape of what this may mean in the popularised, westernised concept of someone who has a personal meditation practice, I felt very cautious.

As 2015 drew to an end I was invited onto the UK's first Community Dharma Leaders (CDL) training programme, authorised by the Gaia House Teacher Council, and today, two and a half years since its inception, Southsea Sangha

is unrecognisable. We still use the same great space and I still have a key, but so do seven other volunteers. After 15 months of going solo each month, we now run weekly groups of two different meditation programmes with between 20-30 in attendance each week. Since June 2016 we've also been running a weekly SanghaSeva project with a local independent café, distributing excess food waste to a local food shelter to feed the local homeless community. We've delivered hundreds of pies, and have several volunteers taking their practice off the cushion and into the community. In August 2016 we also began a support group for mums who meditate or are just interested in meditation. They meet once a month in a space for kids and babies to play, while mums can chat around their practice and connect as a sangha. They have a mindful parenting library and an online element, where Dharma teachers deliver a guided meditation and Dharma talks on motherhood and parenting at a time that fits in with having young children. We have lots planned for the coming year, and I'm pleased to say that in the three or so years we've been going, there have only been a few evenings without someone new showing up.

Where do we go from here? In all honesty I have no idea. I have an idea of what I'd like to see unfold, what I'd like to see grow, but there

is no certainty it will happen or stick with those showing up each week. I'm supported by a great bunch of volunteers and my willingness to fail is still strong!

When asked to write this, some of the questions were around what makes this community thrive? What do we do differently? What are our values? All big questions and I can't be sure what we do differently. I haven't much experience of other sanghas. What I do encourage is to bring some vibrant energy to our group and for facilitators so make their groups personal and to embrace the interpersonal as well as the intrapersonal. You can walk in one week and have Iggy Pop, King Krule or Joy Division blaring from the stereo and Bowie, Warpaint or Khruangbin the next. We celebrate urban Dharma practice and the unique personal touches of those leading the groups. I often think: "Would this challenge peoples' fixed views?" If the answer is yes, I try it!

Our values have been tweaked as the group has matured but at the centre has always been inclusivity and removing barriers to

participation. We run entirely on dana and as a sangha, we are committed to engaging in social action, educating and reflecting on social and politically-conditioned constructs which feed and generate suffering, discord and the illusion of separation in our broader communities – Everyday Dharma. For example, we recently held a training session around white privilege for our organising committee with the aim to roll this training out to our broader sangha, other sanghas nationwide and local non-practicing communities. We aim to hold up and bring the radical nature of the Dharma to the fore. The Buddha went against the political and social streams of his time with the radical teachings in the form of the Dharma. I strongly believe he was a revolutionary. This practice is subversive and the outcome, I believe, is seditious. We don't see why this should be any different now, 2,600 years later. It could be argued we need wise and compassionate action and beings more than ever. Like one of my friends and teachers, Noah Levine, once said: "Waking up is not a selfish pursuit of happiness, it's a revolutionary stance from the inside out, for the benefit of all beings".





# LIVING FEARLESSLY WITH CHANGE

## Class of 2017

**Rachel Davies**

In 2016 we started a 10-month course entitled Living Fearlessly with Change for those who wanted to explore practice and service in the areas of ageing, sickness and dying. The course consisted of three residential retreats at the beautiful Bala Brook retreat centre on Dartmoor, the offering of service, ongoing guidance and support from teachers Jean Wilkins and Zohar Lavie, and an online forum and sangha support.

Brian, a participant on the course, shared this story about his experience in a hospice, which encapsulates the unexpected learning that can come about in exploring the dance between Dharma practice and service.

### A Story of Letting Go

"How should we be present with those near the end of their life? It's a question I faced in my voluntary work at a local hospice. My choice to do service work there was motivated by a desire to foster a different kind of engagement with my fears about death. In part because of this motivation, I brought to my initial volunteer sessions a certain kind of seriousness in my encounters with patients – one which contrasted with the ease that many of the skilful nurses showed. It proved difficult for me to meet people in anything other than a solemn mode.

One day I came direct to the hospice after climbing at an indoor wall. I wore shorts at the gym that could be converted into trousers by zipping in the legs. Running late, I threw the legs into the top of my rucksack and cycled off. Moving along I felt that one of the trouser legs had fallen out on to the ground. Circling around to pick it up, I then noticed the other one was not in the rucksack. Cycling back I couldn't find the second leg. Now running well behind I decided to rush off to the hospice anyway.

What do you do with one and a half trouser legs? Wearing my trousers as shorts seemed disrespectful and out of place. Wearing only one leg seemed odd and out of place. I choose to be odd. I put on the longest apron I could find and hoped to get through my shift without too much awkwardness. Interacting with staff in the meal preparation room, I tried as best I could to stand parallel to them with my best leg forward. Did they notice? No one said anything.

Delivering food to the patients left me more exposed. Still, after an hour no one commented or seemed to notice my missing trouser leg. However, bringing a meal out to one patient on the women's ward, another patient in the middle of the room said (well actually she seemed to shout) "Why do you *only* have one leg?" The other women and the nurse in the room turned around. Heads were poking out here and there, all looking at my one leg. An uncomfortable silence followed.

Standing in the middle of the main ward, I went into the story of the lost trouser leg, my efforts to retrieve it, and the choice of what to wear. The women's initial disbelief in my story gave way to individual chuckles that then gave way to infectious group laughter. Lots of questions followed. 'Why didn't I just wear shorts?', 'Why was I climbing?', 'Where was my accent from?' etc. The ward became animated in a way I had never seen it; the patients began speaking with other patients and the nurses. I moved between the patients delivering food, while engaging in conversation and making jokes.

Somehow even before I entered into the men's ward, everyone seemed to have heard the story

and they were awaiting my arrival in order to poke fun at my predicament. Lots of questions followed. I likewise moved between the patients delivering food, engaging in conversation, and making jokes. In my volunteering in the weeks that followed, the nurses all seemed to have heard the story of the missing trouser leg. More conversations followed.

For me my missing trouser leg provided the basis into a much more engaged, animated and humane relationship with others, one that was able to crack the block that surrounded my initial volunteering. It brought the possibility of a lightness in my interactions; a lightness often appreciated by the patients."



If you are interested in exploring the dance between Dharma practice and service, and would like to register your interest for any possible future course similar to this, please email Rachel on [outreach@gaiahouse.co.uk](mailto:outreach@gaiahouse.co.uk). Last time, demand for places was high, so although we would advertise any future course in the usual ways, we recommend being in touch if you are interested and we will email you with details when they become available.



# THE TREE THAT WOULD NOT LET GO OF ITS LEAVES

A short story

**Will Newitt, Garden Coordinator**

Ollie was a little oak tree. He lived in the middle of a big forest with lots of woodland animals and flowers.

Ollie was happy being an oak tree until one autumn.

As the sun rose later in the sky and the air began to cool, Ollie noticed that his wobbly green leaves were turning beautiful shades of orange and yellow and red. Ollie liked this very much and he stood tall and proud.

For a few months, all the trees in the forest blazed their fiery autumnal colours. It was a time of great joy as children laughed and played and the animals busied themselves collecting food for winter.

But then, as the winds blew stronger from the north, Ollie saw that the trees around him were starting to lose their leaves. At first, just the occasional leaf floated gently to the ground but gradually more and more turned and tumbled down.

Ollie was very worried by what he saw. He certainly did not want to lose his colourful coat and so he held on tightly to every leaf on every branch. The other trees noticed what was happening and laughed. "Oh Ollie," they cried, "you are an oak tree, you have to let go of your leaves."

But Ollie would not let go.

The frosty nights of winter crept slowly in. By now, news of the tree that would not let go of its leaves had spread far and wide and many people came to gaze and wonder at such a strange sight.

But Ollie would still not let go.

Months passed and the first delicate flowers pushed through the hard earth and whispered of

spring. A sweet warm wind danced through the forest and the birds sang with joy. But by now Ollie's leaves were brown and rotten and his branches bowed low with the strain.

As he peered around he noticed that the trees around him were starting to change. On the tips of their bare branches were shiny little buds and from these shiny little buds, tiny green leaves were starting to unfurl, slowly at first but gathering pace as the sun became warmer.

As the trees stirred from their silent sleep, they were surprised to see Ollie looking so sorry for himself. "Can't you see that spring is here and now our nature is to grow fresh new leaves?" they whispered.

"We'll drink in the sunshine all summer long and then, when autumn comes we will let go of our leaves in order to nourish the earth and make way for next year's growth. We do so with open hearts because we know that we can never truly hold on to anything."

Suddenly Ollie understood. In a moment he saw that sometimes you must let go of something in order to grow stronger and, in a big brown cloud, his leaves tumbled happily to the ground.

"Thank you," called the bare forest floor beneath Ollie, "in time these leaves will turn into earth and your big roots will absorb their goodness. By letting go you will truly become a wise and wonderful tree."

A gentle murmur spread through the forest as the other trees swayed in agreement. And as for Ollie? Well he spread his branches to the sun and stood taller than ever.



Will is working on various short stories for children. If you would like to contact him his email is [willnewitt@hotmail.com](mailto:willnewitt@hotmail.com)

# PLAN FOR THE FUTURE WITH GAIA HOUSE IN MIND

Leaving a gift in your will is a wonderful way to demonstrate the care and love you have for the people and organisations that are dear to your heart.

We invite you to consider naming Gaia House as a beneficiary in your will. Your gift, no matter how big or small, will help ensure that Gaia House continues to be a place of refuge and transformation for thousands of people, long into the future.

Our Will-making Information Pack contains practical information on creating and updating your will and is available to download from our website: [www.gaiahouse.co.uk/support-us/legacies/](http://www.gaiahouse.co.uk/support-us/legacies/)

Our Finance Manager, Michelle Foster, is here to answer any questions you may have, and can also send you an information pack by post. Please email [financemanager@gaiahouse.co.uk](mailto:financemanager@gaiahouse.co.uk) or call Michelle direct on 01626 323882.

*"I remain grateful to Gaia House, teachers, staff, coordinators and community over the last 25+ years (I knew the original Gaia House when it was very small and yet powerful in its message and teachings), where I too, have benefited from a reduced rate, single rooms, general assistance and unconditional kindness and compassion when needed, facilitated by the generosity of benefactors and donations.*

*Of all the places I have stayed in, ashrams, centres, around the world, Gaia House is the place I always come home too. It has provided me with the peace, space and time so needed for my internal growth and balance. Indeed it is my second home. It is my honour to be able to offer this bequest." M.E.*



Every gift will make a difference

# COMING SOON...

## Not Turning Away Sponsored all-night vigil Saturday 2 December 2017

Dharma Action Network for Climate Engagement (DANCE) is coordinating a sponsored All-night vigil for practice and reflection to inspire compassionate responses to the climate crisis. Climate change caused by human activity is already contributing to considerable suffering in many parts of the world. The extent of the suffering for large numbers of beings in the future is challenging and painful to contemplate. This vigil will be a powerful and beautiful way of supporting us to turn to face these unfolding challenges with courage and wisdom.

This will be the sixth all-night vigil at Gaia House. As in previous years we hope other groups of practitioners will hold simultaneous vigils. If you would like to organise a local vigil we can offer suggestions on how to create this opportunity for practice, contemplation and inspiration. If organising a whole night feels too daunting you may consider coming together till midnight or the early hours of the morning.

The Gaia House vigil will consist of periods of sitting and walking meditation, reflection, music, poetry and gentle movement. Please don't be put off by the idea of staying up all night. This is an opportunity to practise together in a very special way. Participants in our previous vigils have found this a very profound, meaningful and beautiful way of practising, supported and energised by a shared intention and each other's presence.

The vigil will be linked to an invitation to donate to 350.org, the global grassroots climate movement working to achieve a safe climate and a just, prosperous, and equitable world.

Please email [allnightvigil2017@gmail.com](mailto:allnightvigil2017@gmail.com) to register for the Gaia House vigil or to express interest in organising a vigil in your own area.







# VEGAN MUSHROOM RISOTTO

**Natalie Smith, Kitchen Coordinator**

One of life's pure indulgence dishes has to be a creamy, rich plate of freshly-cooked risotto, which until concocting this recipe I would have thought impossible without the standard addition of much wine, butter and parmesan.

Although I am a huge fan of the original, this vegan alternative has been a revelation to me. Please always make and serve straight away, and keep the consistency soft and wet – you want the rice to relax onto the plate.

Lovely served with a big bowl of garden salad – peppery watercress or rocket works really well with the rich creaminess of the rice. Keep it simple and just dress the leaves with lemon and olive oil, salt and pepper. Enjoy!

**Serves four hungry people for dinner**

## Ingredients

Dried porcini mushroom mix	50g
Vegetable stock	2 l
Olive oil	
Large onion	1, finely-diced
Garlic cloves	3, chopped
Bay leaves	3
Fresh rosemary or thyme	to taste
Button mushrooms*	400 g
Arborio rice	500 g
Nutritional yeast**	6 tablespoons
Salt and pepper	to taste
Lemon	a squeeze

\* Each mushroom cut into about six wedges depending on size

\*\* Decide when you try it if you want more – it's the cheese replacement

## Method

1. Make a hearty vegetable stock. This can be any combination of carrot, onion, leek, garlic, celery, parsley stalks and/or any hard herbs: thyme, rosemary, bay leaf & some peppercorns. Cover with water. Bring this to the boil then let it simmer for around half an hour. Then drain the stock, discard the veggies and voila – a tasty, nutritious stock. Alternatively, there are some very good vegetable stock powders available, but I always whip up my own if time and energy permits!
2. Cover and soak the dried mushrooms in 500ml of boiling water for at least 20 minutes. Keep the liquid to use later.
3. Sweat down the finely-diced onion in olive oil till clear and sweet. Add chopped garlic, rosemary or thyme and bay leaves, and cook out for a further five or so minutes. Now add button mushrooms and cook for five minutes. Season with a little salt and pepper as you go.



4. Now pour in the rice, making sure you have a reasonable amount of olive oil in the base as you want the oil to coat the rice. Using a wooden spoon start moving the rice around, gently warming the grains and encouraging them to start to open. This part is rather important as it sets the rice up for when the liquid starts being added. Give it a minute or two on medium heat, keep the rice moving, then start to add your stock, ladle by ladle. You don't want to add too much at once, just wait for the liquid to be absorbed then add more. Keep it moving and turn down the heat if the bottom feels like it's sticking. About 10 minutes in you can add the soaked dried mushroom mix, including the liquid – the water has heaps of flavour so throw it all in.

Keep adding stock until the rice is cooked – around 25 minutes. Before serving, stir in your nutritional yeast. I like a lot but you don't want to overdo it. Try a little first then keep adding to taste. Check your seasoning, adding more salt and pepper if needed. Finish with a good squeeze of lemon. Serve hot onto plate.

## Cook's tip

If you have them in your spice rack, you can always add a heaped teaspoon of fennel seeds, (even more flavoursome if you toast and grind them first) to the onion base when you start cooking, and to finish, some roughly-chopped flat leaf parsley. Neither ingredient is crucial but they can add a little culinary sparkle to the dish.



# CORNBREAD

## A vegan and gluten-free version

**Bill Ball, Kitchen Coordinator**

This simple recipe provides an excellent substitute for conventional cornbread, which is traditionally made with eggs, milk and flour containing gluten.

Ingredients	For 20 x 20 cm square tray	For 30 x 24 cm rectangular tray
Cornmeal (polenta)	150 g	300 g
Gluten-free plain flour	160 g	320 g
Organic cane sugar	50 g	100 g
Baking powder	1 tsp	2 tsp
Baking soda	1 tsp	2 tsp
Salt	1 tsp	2 tsp
Almond milk (unsweetened)*	300 ml	600 ml
Sunflower oil	212 ml	425 ml
Cider vinegar	2 tsp	4 tsp
Dry uncooked chickpeas	200 g	400 g
Chickpea brine (aquafabba)	125 ml	250 ml

\*Open new cartons, replace cap and shake contents thoroughly before use

### Method

**1.** To make the aquafabba, soak the chickpeas in water overnight. Before cooking, drain the soaking water and replace with enough fresh water to cover the chickpeas. Bring to the boil for 15 minutes then simmer until the chickpeas are very soft. Strain liquid into a small container and cool to room temperature to allow the liquid to thicken to a thin jelly (can be stored overnight in the fridge or for longer periods in the freezer).

**2.** Combine the dry ingredients and mix together. In a separate bowl add milk, oil, vinegar, then using a wire hand whisk, beat together thoroughly to make a thin emulsion. Add to the cornmeal/flour/sugar mix, and combine by stirring thoroughly with a spatula or wooden spoon to form a smooth but substantial batter.

**3.** Measure cooled, thickened aquafabba into a confined container (e.g. measuring jug) and blend thoroughly with a small hand-held electric blender until the liquid changes to a white froth with some stiff foam. Fold into the batter mix until thoroughly absorbed, then tip into a lightly-oiled tray. Bake in the oven at 180°C for 30-35mins until set and edges turning very slightly brown.

**4.** Remove from the oven and leave to cool for 30mins before serving to allow the cornbread to settle and become firm. Cut into portions with a sharp knife while still warm. The recipe should yield slices that are 2 cm in depth.



### BRIGHTON

Please check the website for upcoming events: [www.bodhitreebrighton.org.uk](http://www.bodhitreebrighton.org.uk)

Contact: [btbsecretary@gmail.com](mailto:btbsecretary@gmail.com)

### FROME

Newly-established Frome Insight are now offering monthly day retreats in Somerset

Contact: [www.fromeinsight.weebly.com](http://www.fromeinsight.weebly.com)

### BRISTOL

**3 Dec Christina Feldman**  
**Awakening and Forgetting**

During this retreat we will reflect on the qualities that support an awakened and dignified life and the factors that undermine that quest.

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

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

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**30 Oct 4 Nov / 2 Dec**  
**Self-led Retreat Days**

Participants are welcome to book their place in advance or turn up on the day.

**Venue:** Horfield Quaker Meeting House, 300 Gloucester Road, Horfield, Bristol BS7 8PD

**Time:** 10am – 5pm (please arrive promptly, to be settled to begin by 10.15am)

**Cost:** £15 per participant (£7.50 concessions) payable on the day

**Contact:** Max on 07581 127734 or David Ringsell on [david@talk-it.biz](mailto:david@talk-it.biz)

### CAMBRIDGE

**16 Sep Laura Bridgman**  
**26 May Bhante Bodhidharma 2018**

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

Contact: [cambridgeinsight@gmail.com](mailto:cambridgeinsight@gmail.com)  
<https://cambridgedayretreats.wordpress.com/>

### MID-WALES

**8 Oct Jaya Karen Rudgard**  
**Meditation 101**

**Venue:** The Pales, LD1 5UH

**Time:** 10am-4.30pm,

It will be a day of practising and consolidating our understanding of meditation skills, especially mindfulness of breathing.

Whether we are experienced practitioners or new to meditation, we will explore together how we can approach practice so that it can become a source of enjoyment and benefit in ordinary daily life. The day will include some qi gong (mindful movement) and time for sharing and discussion.

[www.meditationmidwales.org/coming-up-taught-day-retreats](http://www.meditationmidwales.org/coming-up-taught-day-retreats)

### OXFORD

**23 Sep Jaya Karen Rudgard**  
**21 Oct Bhante Bodhidharma**  
**18 Nov Yanai Postelnik**

**Venue:** Old Headington Village Hall

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

**Cost:** £10 (£5 concession) plus teacher dana

**Contact:** [www.oxfordgaiahouseretreats.co.uk](http://www.oxfordgaiahouseretreats.co.uk) (for booking, what to bring and other information)

**General enquiries:**

Brigid or David  
01608 811 940

### SHEFFIELD

**9-10 Sep Zohar Lavie**  
**Non-residential weekend retreat**

**Venue:** Whirlow Spirituality Centre

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**28-31 Dec Non-residential New Year Retreat**

**Contact:** River Wotton  
07748 271 470  
[sghsg2009@gmail.com](mailto:sghsg2009@gmail.com)

[www.sheffieldinsightmeditation.org.uk](http://www.sheffieldinsightmeditation.org.uk)

# London Insight Meditation – 2017 schedule

## 16 Sep

Meditation day  
Ajahn Sucitto  
"I" without "am"...the open field of mind  
King Alfred School

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## 17 Sep

Meditation day  
Ajahn Sucitto  
"I" without "am"...the open field of mind  
King Alfred School

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## 1 Oct

Meditation day  
Catherine McGee  
Finding True Refuge in a Modern World  
King Alfred School

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## 19 Oct

Evening  
Chris Cullen & Clare Brunt (CDL)  
Beginners' Evening  
St Luke's Community Centre

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## 22 Oct

Meditation day  
Bhante Bodhidhamma  
King Alfred School

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## 4 Nov

Workshop  
Christina Feldman & Chris Cullen  
Mindfulness and Wise Effect  
St Luke's Community Centre

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## 10 Nov

Evening  
John Teasdale  
Understanding Mindfulness and Inner  
Awakening  
St Luke's Community Centre

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## 18 Nov

Meditation day  
Christina Feldman  
The Making of a Self  
King Alfred School

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## 19 Nov

Meditation day  
Christina Feldman  
The Making of a Self (for experienced students)  
King Alfred School

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## 17 Dec

Meditation day  
Jake Dartington  
Aspirations and Ideals  
King Alfred School

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### Contact details:

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

# SanghaSeva

Meditation in Action Retreats led by  
Zohar Lavie and Nathan Glyde

## 11-22 Oct Being Peace Retreat

Being the change we wish to see by  
opening to the age-old conflict in Israel and  
Palestine

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## 27-28 Oct Being Peace Weekend Retreat

Meeting the conflict with peace and  
understanding in Israel and Palestine

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## 1-30 Jan 2018 The Power of Love

Volunteering at Anandwan, a leprosy  
rehabilitation community in India

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## 12-31 March 2018 Sustainable Living Work Retreat

Eco-building at Dharmalaya; an institute for  
compassionate living in India

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## 30 June 2018 Earth Care Day

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

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

# Retreat to Gayles

Eastbourne, East Sussex

## Returning to the Heart: an Insight Meditation Retreat with Yanai Postelnik

### 1-3 December 2017

The Buddha's teachings offer a pathway  
to discover inner peace, freedom and the  
compassionate heart. This silent retreat will  
focus on cultivating a quality of conscious  
presence that embraces our mind and body  
with kindness and wisdom, and supports us  
to re-connect with what is most important in  
our lives. All are welcome.

**Contact:** [info@retreattogayles.co.uk](mailto:info@retreattogayles.co.uk)  
07721 023 845

**<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

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[roy.cramer1@virgin.net](mailto:roy.cramer1@virgin.net)

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[mannieburn@aol.com](mailto:mannieburn@aol.com)

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0729 090  
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### HERTFORDSHIRE

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### KENT

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### NETHERLANDS

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## SITTING GROUPS

### Organise a short retreat in your area

Are you part of a sitting group and would like to sit a retreat closer to home? Gaia House wants to support any sitting group that would like to organise one-day or short residential retreats in their local area. There are various ways we can help with this – please contact Rachel on [outreach@gaiahouse.co.uk](mailto:outreach@gaiahouse.co.uk) if you would like to explore this further.

### Interested in setting up a sitting group?

Have you been to Gaia House but can't find a sitting group near to you? Might you consider starting a sitting group but don't know where to begin? Contact Rachel on [outreach@gaiahouse.co.uk](mailto:outreach@gaiahouse.co.uk) for a chat and we can discuss what it involves, offer advice and provide helpful resources.

## NEW DHARMA RESOURCES

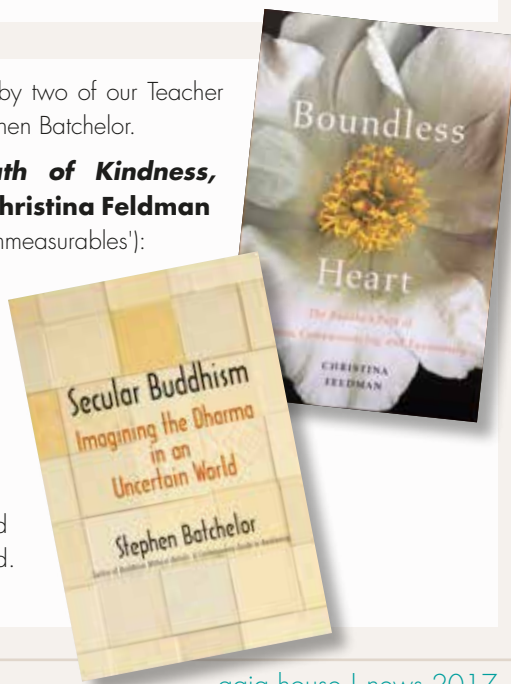
2017 has seen the publication of new books by two of our Teacher Council members – Christina Feldman and Stephen Batchelor.

### ***Boundless Heart: The Buddha's Path of Kindness, Compassion, Joy, and Equanimity* by Christina Feldman**

explores the brahma viharas (known as the 'Four Immeasurables'): friendliness, compassion, joy, and equanimity and is available from Shambala Publications.

### ***Secular Buddhism: Imagining the Dharma in an Uncertain World* by Stephen Batchelor**

explores the complex implications of Buddhism's secularisation, offering a detailed picture of contemporary Buddhism and its attempt to find a voice in the modern world. Available from Yale University Press.



**SUPPORT OUR BUILDING APPEAL**  
Help us fund vital work to ensure we can continue to deliver Gaia House's transformative work now and into the future

The demand for what Gaia House offers has increased significantly over the last 20 years and our facilities are now stretched to the limit.

To address the challenges that we are experiencing, we plan to deliver a significant building development project to ensure that we are able to meet the emerging and future demands on us and be more accessible to a greater range of people.

We ask you to support the appeal as generously as you are able, whether through donations or your own fundraising activities, and we extend heartfelt gratitude for your generosity.

To find out more, make a donation or get ideas for fundraising activities, please visit [www.gaiahouse.co.uk](http://www.gaiahouse.co.uk)



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

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