

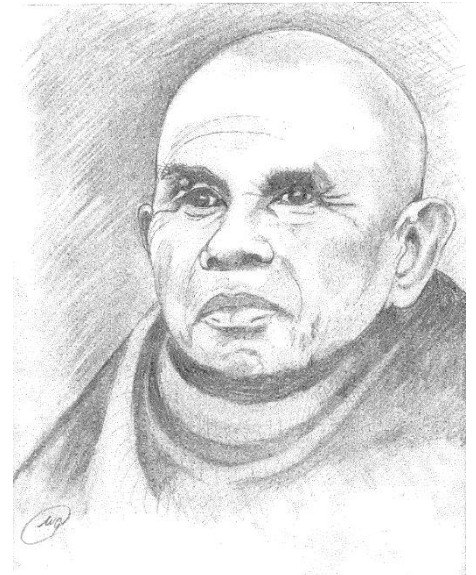
Scottish Sangha Newsletter

No. 9 – May 2026

Welcome to the ninth edition of the newsletter for all who practice in the Plum Village tradition in Scotland

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Pencil Drawing of Thay - Bill Crook

Welcome

Dear Friends,

As I write this editorial, I cannot help but feel joy and optimism as I look out of the window to nature in all its glory, almost as if it were shouting *HEY! look at me*. Edinburgh in Spring is spectacular, so full of blossom trees. The plum tree that the Wild Geese Sangha planted in the meadows, at the heart of the city, is joining in with these celebrations of new life. Is it me, or is there a special colour of green that is shown off in the newly born leaves that not even the most skilled of artists could reproduce?

New journeys are also starting for our new Scottish Dharma Teachers, Lindsay and Jane Ellen. May they also blossom and shed much joy within our Sanghas.

This Spring edition of the newsletter is bursting with artistic and creative talents from poetry to painting, to book illustration, and creative mini retreats. I loved the poem "Spring Trios" by Lesley Morrison with the last few words - "three's a crowd" - bringing a smile.

New life is growing too, if I'm not going too far with this theme, in the Being Peace Centre. Andrew's reflections of a young child that needs the support of different talents is I feel a wonderful open invitation to get involved. I very much appreciate the travel advice too from Andrew as many of us will be following in his footsteps and journeying by train.

An old friend is returning to Wiston Lodge, but in a different guise. Brother Phap Vu, now transformed into Dharma Teacher Cliff Brown is back with us. I have fond memories of Cliff staying with me in Shetland, visiting local schools and giving a talk in Lerwick Library. Then fully robed, he was quite the centre of attention. The retreat is fully booked and will be taking place in the next few days.

Finally, what great offers to sustain us in difficult times. Retreats, Days of Mindfulness, opportunities to reflect on the Diamond Sutra, Mindful hiking, even the possibility of a new Sangha. So many opportunities to look forward to.

I wish you peace and joy in the coming months. With love and a lotus...

Bill Crook
Pure Blossom of Joy

What's Coming Up in Scotland? *Events open to all*

Sunday May 3rd

Touching the Earth Sangha, Aberdeen, is offering a Day of Mindfulness at Murtle Hall on the Camphill Estate, Bielside, Aberdeen. We will be celebrating both the return of Spring and 60 years of the Order of Interbeing. If you would like to come along, you would be very welcome. Contact Lindsay Lumsden (linds.lumsden@gmail.com) for further details.

Saturday May 16th, 14:30-17:30, Online

Creative Mini Retreat 1: Watering Seeds of Creativity

With Dharma teacher Susanne Olbrich
Exploring creativity as a Dharma door, this afternoon is an opportunity to be in touch with the heart and source of your creativity through meditation, reflection, creative discovery and play.

Info & booking: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/1984301738917>



Artwork by Sharon Leighton

Sunday May 17th, 0945 - 1645

Friends on the Path: A day of mindful hiking with the Wild Geese Sangha of Edinburgh

This will be at East Linton/Tynninghame, which is fully accessible by public transport. Meet in the park next to East Linton Railway Station (Our walk corresponds with the arrival of the 09:21 service from Edinburgh Waverley and the departure of the 16:45 return train). We will walk together in silence for most of the day through woods and out to the coast, returning via a riverside. Breaks and lunch will not be in silence - please bring a packed, plant-based lunch and snacks for yourself. Open to everyone, of all faiths and none. For more information or to contact us please visit: wildgeesezen.org



Saturday June 6th - Day of Mindfulness

The *Edinburgh Wild Geese* have a Day of Mindfulness on the first Saturday of each month. Further details for each month are on their website (wildgeesezen.org). Also, keep an eye on our social media websites. People can sign up to receive our emailing list here:

<https://wildgeesezen.org/contact-us/>.

Wild Geese Sangha have a programme open to everyone with regular weekly meetings on Thursday evenings and Friday mornings



Artwork by Sharon Leighton

Saturday June 27th, 14:30-17:30, Online

Creative Mini Retreat 2: Nourishing Creativity Through Earth Connection

With Dharma teacher Susanne Olbrich
How can we nurture our creativity in life and a range of media? Taking time to experience our interbeing with the web of life, we'll allow our creative process to be inspired by deep connection with the earth and the natural world.

Info & booking: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/1988061683011>

Edinburgh Wild Geese have regular Mindful Walks, again see wildgeesezen.org for details

- **Sunday June 28th** - Lauriston Castle
- **Sunday 19th July** – Edinburgh Meadows
- **Sunday 6th September** - Saughton Park

The Scots Pine Sangha meets online on Wednesday evenings from 1900 - 2100. All are welcome, whoever or wherever you are. Meetings are held in English. We have members across Scotland, in several European countries, and one or two across the Atlantic. If you live in so-called 'remote or rural' areas the Sangha offers an opportunity to connect and broaden horizons. Anyone interested, please contact John Wood: airwood@pm.me

Retreats

May 7 - 10 2026 at **Wiston Lodge** in the Borders:

Walking in the World: Navigating through difficult times. The Retreat will be led by **Cliff Brown**, a US Dharma Teacher.



Well known to the Scottish sangha as Brother Phap Vu, Cliff was a monastic dharma teacher in the Plum Village tradition for 13 years. He has recently returned to lay life.

During this retreat we will enjoy dharma talks from Cliff and we will sit, eat and walk together as a sangha – strengthening our mindfulness practice in order to embrace the challenges of our lives with clarity, peace and joy.



More information on the PV UK website: <https://plumvillage.uk/event/walking-in-the-world-retreat-in-scotland/>

Spring 2027, probably May, dates to be finalised soon.

Deepening our Practice: Exploring the Threefold Training

This Dharma Training Retreat with Dharma Teachers Susanne Olbrich and Lindsay Lumsden has been postponed from Autumn this year.

Rooted in the Plum Village teachings, the Threefold Training offers a simple yet profound path: concentration, ethical conduct, and insight; interwoven and interdependent.

This retreat will explore how these teachings can help us deepen our practice, leading to greater happiness and freedom. Further information will be available soon



John Wood offers something to reflect on, and an invitation:

*All composed things are like a dream,
a phantom, a drop of dew, a flash of lightning
That is how to meditate on them,
that is how to observe them*

(From the Diamond Sutra, as quoted in:
Thich Nhat Hanh's book: The Diamond that Cuts through Illusion, 2010)

John is considering an **online dharma sharing group to look at this sutra** and Thay's commentary on it, starting in September. It will be open to anyone to come as and when convenient. Obtaining the book will be recommended but not essential. If you are interested, please contact airwood@pm.me.

Lamp Transmission Ceremony

On 26th March two Scottish Sangha members received the Lamp Transmission from senior monastics in Plum Village, France. This great honour and occasion was recorded on still photographs, video, and through the reflections of the two people involved - **Lindsay Lumsden**, Touching The Earth Sangha, *True Flower of Happiness*, and **Jane Ellen Combelic**, Northern Lights Sangha, *True Lotus Meditation*.

We arrived in Plum Village in warm, spring sunshine—trees in leaf, flowers in bloom, spring so much further on than in the north of Scotland! We were a very small retreat of 21 people receiving the lamp and 23 people receiving the 14 Mindfulness Trainings, along with a few family and friends. So, it felt very spacious and calm, a very different week from a normal retreat because the main focus was the ceremonies. The opening ceremony was magnificent with the temple drum thundering out in a call and response with the bell. We were in no doubt of the significance of these ceremonies. The Lamp Transmission ceremonies were personal and intimate, and we were lucky that they were filmed so that we could share them with friends and family, and so that we could listen again to Sister Chan Duc's beautiful words of encouragement.

Lindsay: *I felt very aware of all the ancestors, sangha friends and mentors who had brought me to this moment of being recognised as a teacher in Thây's Plum Village tradition. It was very humbling and has fed my aspiration of Bodhicitta, to show my gratitude through my actions.*

Jane Ellen: *The week was intense, powerful, transformative. The monks and nuns were warm and welcoming; it was a privilege to be there in such an intimate retreat. On the Sunday before the ceremonies, Sr. Dinh Nghiem gave an amazing talk on the history of Thây's tradition, including many stories I had never heard before. For example, traditionally each Dharma Teacher transmitted the Lamp to only one monastic, who then passed it on to one monastic in the next generation, and so on. But in his exile, Thây saw that the world needed many Dharma Teachers, lay and monastic. I feel honoured to now be one of them.*



Lindsay receiving her lamp



Jane Ellen receiving her lamp

Videos of the Ceremonies:

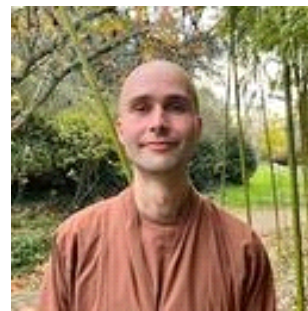
- Opening ceremony - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3mZYbhZfanc&list=PLaX_vxbhs8fief6Vhe32KBnqIS_zAFq92&index=20
- Lindsay's ceremony – https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZOVrqpFmlYE&list=PLaX_vxbhs8fief6Vhe32KBnqIS_zAFq92&index=1
- Jane Ellen's ceremony - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dDvL-MPtWY8&list=PLaX_vxbhs8fief6Vhe32KBnqIS_zAFq92&index=3
- Sr Dinh Nghiem's talk - <https://youtu.be/0gQS8vpxrng?si=xOHmbUjC0FZXXTCq>

My Day of Being Peace, with Edinburgh Wake Up...

... and with Brother Dao Bi



and Brother Nhat Tu



It was such a joyful Saturday 11th April, a 'Day of Being Peace Mindfulness' meticulously and skillfully organised by Edinburgh Wake Up, embracing about seventy-five practitioners of all ages. I'm feeling very lucky indeed to have been one of them!



Gratitude to the organising team for a truly memorable - wonderful-in-every-moment - day.

What a treat to be amongst so many beautiful young practitioners with two young monks from PV France - Brother One Love (Nhat Tu) and Brother Compassion (Dao Bi) - bringing fun, wisdom, deep mindfulness, relaxation, and so much joy, all to strengthen our practice in being peace. And the ethereal beauty that always emanates from our beloved monastics. I strongly felt Thay's continuation coming through these young monks.

Brother Dao Bi's engaging Dharma teaching on Being Peace, absorbed us all with content to strengthen our practice. It was followed by silent walking meditation and the silent lunch eating, both of which I found very powerful.

The meditation walk took a wonderful route that felt to me like encompassing the whole world: the food market, the smiling alms people, the distant tram bell, the spring flowers, the varied trees, the park statues, the busy streets, the descending steps, the traffic. We were flowing as a river embodying peace, led by Brother Dao Bi and Brother Nhat Tu who, on our return, also guided the meditative eating of our packed lunches - followed by time to talk, make new friends and catch up with others.



And then the deep relaxation meditation, beautifully guided by Iona. So many people filling every space on the floor, toes touching, the blissful comfort of being togetherness, of being community.

And not to forget Thian's joyful guitar-playing and sharing of Plum songs for us all to sing, plus the supportive Ask-a-Monk Q&A session.

I am amazed at how energized, relaxed and smiling I am still feeling from this one day. I clearly see how profoundly happy I am in this practice.

It really was a very special day that Edinburgh Wake Up gave us. Thank you!

Jude Wynne

Precious Practice of the Source

An Angus Sangha?

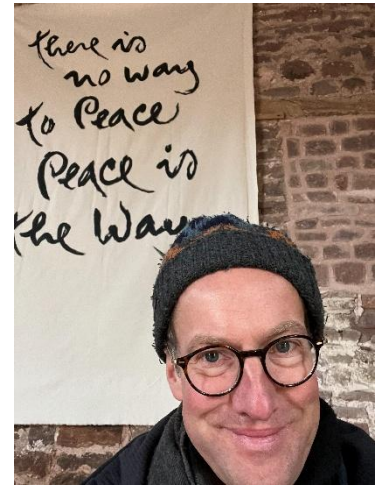
Jude is wondering if there are other practitioners living in Angus who would be interested in starting an in-person Angus-based sangha, registered with and following guidelines of PV UK? If you would like to explore ideas for this together with Jude, please E-mail: judithwynne@yahoo.co.uk

Reflections on a Retreat at the Being Peace Centre, Abenhall

Having recently come back from a five-day retreat at our new UK practice centre (alongside fellow Wild Geese sangha member Carla), I have put together the following reflections in case they are useful for anyone else considering a visit.

I have the feeling of the birth of a shared community space that can, with wider sangha support, grow into the most fantastic multi-faceted space for teaching, deepening personal bonds with people and nature, and a place of refuge and replenishment in a difficult world.

The centre feels like a young child that needs the support of people with different talents and experience to help it expand its full potential. Quite what that looks like remains undefined and will be determined by the commitment, creativity and financial support of sangha members across the UK. My heartfelt wish is that in time it could develop into a permanent monastery with a living residency of monks and nuns. Initially I understand that there has been a commitment for monastic support for 3 months in 2026 – this starting with a group of monastics running retreats during April and May.



Setting: The centre is set within about 54 acres of a rolling quiet landscape in the Gloucestershire countryside. There is ample scope to get lost in different settings within the land, including some ancient woodland, meadow, and watercourses. Unsurprisingly the land reflects its recent role as grazing for animals and the keeping of horses (so lots of grass!). What is exciting is to envision how the land will develop with plans already starting to re-wild some parts whilst setting aside some small areas for the growing of fruit and vegetables.

Retreat: I attended an 'Earth as Teacher' retreat which prioritised dharma talks, deep relaxation and sharing circles outside when the weather permitted (we were lucky with a lot of spring sunshine ☀️) This gave me the opportunity to connect with the land, plunge my feet into a stream, and meditate at the base of an ancient oak tree.

Accommodation: Already, within a few months, some lovely spaces have been established including a meditation hall which accommodates up to about 40-50 people. There is a tea station with its indoor/outdoor space providing a focal point for social interactions. I understand there are the beginnings of plans for a larger meditation space in what is currently an old barn and to turn the tea station into a large dining hall (dining space is currently spread between 3 different rooms).

I was in a dorm of 4 with an en-suite shower room which, whilst small, was comfortable with good mattresses, an excellent shower, and a fresh modern feel. There are different types of accommodation from single rooms, doubles, and dorms and once planning permission is received,



space for camping in the summer months. Indoor accommodation can sleep about 30 retreatants in addition to staff and volunteers. There is also space for further expansion in the future.

Travel: I travelled by train from Edinburgh, changing at Birmingham to reach Gloucester in just over half a day – giving me time to meditate, read a book and generally prepare for the retreat. Having booked a taxi with my retreat booking, I shared a ride with several others to reach the centre in about 20 minutes from Gloucester railway station.

Future Retreats: I have the intention to make regular trips to join retreats; a full list of 2026 retreats released so far can be found [here](#). Already some regional sanghas have also booked out the centre so that they can meet as a group at Abenhall for a retreat. It would be good to assess whether there is **sufficient interest for a Scottish sangha retreat** of this sort. Please let me know if you are interested (andrewdbruce1972@gmail.com)

Andrew Bruce

Fearless Courage of the Source

Poems

One Day Wee Frankie Woke Up

and thought about nothing.
What, he wondered, was nothing?
He remembered his mother shouting,
There's nothing to see on this damn TV!
Frankie wasn't convinced. He wanted to ask
his big brother Vince. But everyone said,
Vince's head was just full of mince.
His grandad said, Go find something
better to worry about than nothing.
His dad agreed, something
was always better than nothing.
Frankie none wiser
looked for another adviser.
His teacher told Frankie,
you can have nothing and
something, at the same time.
But how? She couldn't explain.
Frankie thought nothing
was becoming a pain.
At playtime, he asked his pal Dave,
How can you have something
and nothing, at the same time?
Dave said, that's easy-peasy,
It's like when grownups tell you,
Behave! You just want to play.
So you say, ok. Then something
just becomes nothing.
Frankie and Dave laughed
about nothing being so daft.

James Lang Smith

Spring Trios

Three lambs bobbing under a sheep
Like pom poms on a woolly jumper,

Three couplets of song from the great tit
Like a musical hammer aloft,

Three wood anemones opening
Like lights glowing through the green,

Three leaves unfurling on a twig
Like tiny hands extending to hold,

Threes keep company in nature
But, at mating time, three's a crowd.....

Lesley Morrison



Angela Manno of Northern Lights Sangha has news of her new book:

I'm happy to share with the Scottish Sangha the recent release of my book, The Sacred Biodiversity Oracle (pictured below), accompanied by 36 full colour postcard size reproductions of my icons of threatened and endangered species. The Sacred Biodiversity Oracle is a creative response to the biodiversity crisis, engaging both heart and mind and stimulating our impulse to alleviate the suffering in the natural world. After meditation exercises that inform and evoke compassion, readers can connect directly to conservation organizations through QR codes on each card, to take meaningful action. This system is a valuable learning tool and can be used individually or in a group setting. To learn more, please click on this [link](#).



Bill Crook has shared this image of an ink and watercolour painting created whilst on a two-week silent personal retreat.

He describes the creative process: "This is a form of meditation. A period of several weeks working with concentration and mindfulness. The outline of the drawing first, then ink and watercolour. Sometimes, as in this case, images come from the heart without fully understanding why, or their full meaning.

Perhaps a feeling or reflection....

This image was created amongst the snow-covered mountains and with just the early snow drops coming through the semi-frozen ground. The artwork is of a Scottish Buddha in an old tartan reflecting the lands heritage. The buddha is part of the landscape and is at one with the birds, the moss, and the dark pine trees. His hand is not only touching the Earth but the beautiful everchanging Loch with its seasonal mists.

The moons reflect the time passing on retreat as they wax and wane."



The Next Newsletter

Thank you, all those who have contributed to this Newsletter. It's a joy to receive the various contributions and creative energies from our beloved Scottish Sangha. There's much going on, and much to celebrate.

This time Jane Ellen Combelic joins me as co-editor, with Susanne Olbrich bowing out after our eight previous collaborations. It has been an instructive pleasure to work with you, Susanne. A deep bow of gratitude.

As we look at the next Newsletter in September, Jane Ellen and I would love to hear from you. What can you tell us? What can you contribute? Do get in touch. We will send out a reminder nearer the time.

If you would like to be on the Scottish mailing list so that you receive this Newsletter directly, do contact Roland by email: roland.spencerjones@gmail.com

We wish you peace, stability and joy in the practice over the coming months. We embrace the warmth and light of late Spring and Summer - new growth, new life.

Roland Spencer-Jones *Compassionate Service of the Heart*

Jane Ellen Combelic *True Lotus Meditation*

