

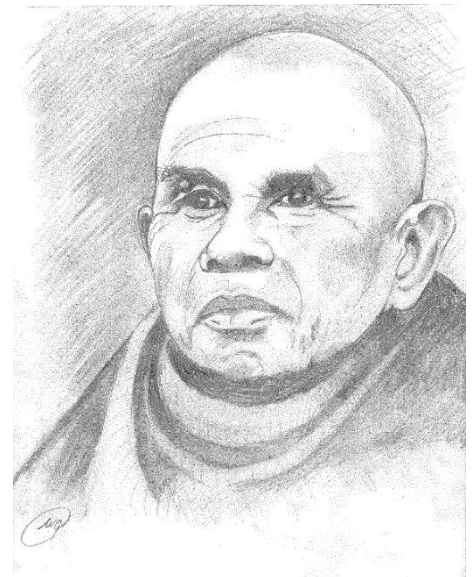
Scottish Sangha Newsletter

No. 10 – September 2026

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

Index:

- p1: Welcome from Jane Ellen
- p2: What's coming up in Scotland
- p3: Poetry Page – Kirstin Laing & James Lang Smith
- p4: Walking Time – Roger Hyam
- p5: From Childhood, through Reflection, to a Book - Jishin
- p6: My Lamp Transmission – Lindsay Lumsden
- p7: Angela Manno, & The Next Newsletter



Line Drawing of Thay - Bill Crook

Welcome...

...to this latest edition of the Scottish Sangha Newsletter. Here in the north of Scotland, near Findhorn, the glorious flowers of summer are fading, the crops are being harvested, the berries are ripening on the bramble bushes. The days are shorter and colder.

I'm grateful for the privilege of living in Scotland, and for being a member of the Scottish sangha. I first visited from my home in Colorado in 2010, having been invited to Findhorn by Susanne Olbrich when I met her at Plum Village. At Northern Lights Sangha that week I met a charming Englishman (who had never been to any kind of meditation group before). We fell in love and some months later, I moved here from the United States. We were married the following year. Eventually we bought a small cottage near Findhorn, and we're still here.

I first heard about Thich Nhat Hanh from Jack Kornfield at a retreat in New Mexico in 1989. Intrigued, I spent three weeks the following summer at Plum Village. Then, for various reasons, I left meditation behind. Only in 2003 did I attend another retreat with Thay, in Colorado. I never looked back.

In 2006 I received the 14 Mindfulness Trainings at Plum Village. This past spring, 20 years later, I received the Transmission of the Lamp to become a Dharma teacher. The two-year training, with six aspirants from England and my friend Lindsay from Aberdeenshire, was a joy. I met with two Dharma Teachers in a small group once a month, and each summer we all gathered at a gorgeous little retreat centre in Wales. As Lindsay notes in her story in this newsletter, the ceremony was a profound and powerful experience.

It's an honour to collaborate with Roland on this newsletter; we've been friends for many years. In this issue, there are also two inspiring poems, an essay by Roger about walking meditation (which brings up fond memories of walking with him and Wild Geese Sangha in the Botanic Garden in Edinburgh), news of an intriguing children's book by Jishin, and a personal reflection on art and ecology with Angela Manno, based on her fabulous artwork and the oracle card deck she created from her icons of endangered species.

Jane Ellen Combelic *True Lotus Meditation*

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

Sunday 4th October 2026 - Day of Mindfulness

Touching the Earth Sangha invite you to join them for a Day of Mindfulness at Murtle Hall, Bieldside, Aberdeenshire. For further information & directions, contact Lindsay.Lumsden@gmail.com

Edinburgh Wild Geese Sangha

The Sangha runs a series of regular weekly meetings:

- Thursday evenings at St Mark's Unitarian Church
- Friday mornings at the Granton Hub
- New weekly Wake Up meetings on Tuesday evenings at the Salisbury Centre.



There are monthly **Days of Mindfulness** at St. Mark's on the first Saturday of each month - ie 5th September, 3rd October, 7th November, 5th December.

Sunday 6th September - a mindful walk at Saughton Park on at 11am

Sunday 20th September - a full day of mindful hiking from East Linton to North Berwick.

All details are on the website and their Facebook/Instagram accounts. The best way to be kept in the loop is to join the mailing list using the <Contact Us> tab on the [website](#).

April 30th – May 3rd 2027 - Dharma Training Retreat

Deepening our Practice: Exploring the Threefold Training

This Retreat with Dharma Teachers Susanne Olbrich and Lindsay Lumsden will take place at Wiston Lodge, in the Scottish Borders.

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 details and booking arrangements will be circulated soon.



February 2027 – a possible Retreat at Burgie House, near Forres.

A small planning group is forming to plan another retreat in this special house and location. If you would like to help with this retreat, please email Sabine Weeke: sabineweeke@ymail.com

John Wood in Gairloch asks: *Fancy dwelling in the Ultimate Dimension? Nirvana?*

An online dharma sharing group focussed on the Diamond Sutra starts on Friday 4 September. We will meet from 6-7pm on the first Friday of every month, and sangha members are welcome to join us. If you receive this after that date don't worry, it's fine to join at any stage. This group could continue for some time, but especially with the Diamond Sutra there is no need to feel you have to attend every session, it's possible to drop in as and when you can.

The Diamond Sutra is challenging but anyone can approach it with a beginner's mind.

We will be using Thich Nhat Hanh's book *The Diamond that Cuts through Illusion* as the basis and a PDF of the relevant section will be circulated with a fresh link before each meeting.

Anyone can join. Please just email me first: ajrwood@pm.me

Poetry Page

This poem is offered by Kirstin Laing, who said:

I recently facilitated my Sangha online, on zoom, and chose Buddha nature as the theme. During the evening, before closing, I read this poem by Donna Ashworth. I love her work and thought it was really appropriate.

BEFORE YOU SLEEP

Leave guilt on the floor
by your slippers and robe
your worries may nestle there too
let shame and embarrassment
slip through the door
there's no place for such things here with you

let memories of laughter
words aimed to warm
fill up any space in your head
remember the smiles
of the people you love
let those treasures come with you to bed

you did all you could
with the day that you had
you led with that heart full of love
you toil and you care
and that's *always* enough
so release that dark load to above

now rest, close your eyes
let your fears melt away
give in to the slumber you crave
you are giving your all
to this cycle of life
welcome dreams and await a new day.

Donna Ashworth



And this poem is offered by James Lang Smith of Rafford Sangha, his creation

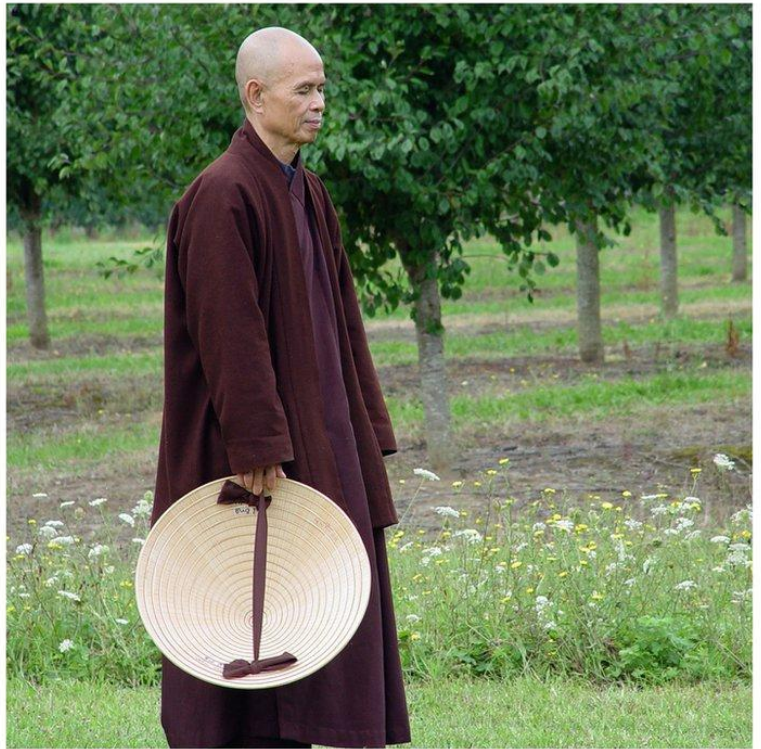
In the neighbourhood of the moon
on a patchworked cloudy night
you shone your blue soul heart
without effort upon my sorrow
and smiled
and fleetingly I understood
without words love was not won
not learned not earned
it was simply me you
everyone and everything
and I wept
bathed in joyous regret
for that which I so often forget

Walking time

Reflections from Roger Hyam, Wild Geese Sangha

I love walking meditation. Returning from a walk with the Wild Geese in Edinburgh an explanation came to me as to why this might be. It helps me feel time in another way, maybe just for a few minutes, but for long enough to find ease.

We can feel time as something we are moving through. We push on from childhood through adult life to old age and death. Another way to sense time is that it is flowing past us. We are a stone, stationary in a river, resisting the water moving around us. They are compelling images but misleading. Both analogies require that we see ourselves as separate from time. We know from the teachings that nothing is a separate self-entity. If we look deeply, we can see this to be true. It requires effort to move forward through our life. The stone must stand firm against the water but is eventually worn down. Both contain subtle, fatiguing suffering. How often we complain of modern life wearing us down?!



As I walk, I notice the two ways of feeling time. At some points my feet and legs are definitely propelling my body along. This is my normal walking energy. At other times I feel like a cartoon character walking on the spot whilst the background moves behind. I'm staying still and my legs are moving the world. Have I stopped?

Once you know that you are looking at an optical illusion then a third way of seeing becomes possible. That picture of the vase that is also two faces can switch back and forth between faces and vase, but you can also see it in a third state, as just a pattern on a piece of paper.

When I'm walking, I think of this third way of experiencing as more like kneading bread. These actions are occurring but without changing the position of anything. With this view comes a feeling of ease, a release of the tension of imposing the notions of coming and going, after or before, on the world. It's not about locomotion, more the sensual pleasure of a dance.

Don't take any of this too literally! Your path may be very different. But I hope the picture I've painted helps you explore what it is to walk slowly amongst the trees.



From Childhood, through Experience, to a Book

A couple of years ago, during a Zen retreat, I had one of those little breakthroughs that somehow changes how you see things.

I realised that much of what I was discovering through practice felt so familiar. As a child, living with my grandparents on their farm in the Basque Country, I had been incredibly good at simply *being* and *looking*. Looking at the light through the petals of a flower, watching ants, sitting by the river, being with the animals... and feeling completely in awe of all of it, all at once. I didn't need to understand or name it. I was just there, part of it.

Somehow, growing up, I had forgotten how to do that, but most importantly, I had forgotten the bliss of that moment. Everything was just fine. Nothing additional was needed.

Over the years, practice has slowly brought me back to that 'place' (more a state than a place). Every morning when I sit, I feel genuinely grateful for having another fresh day ahead of me, those 24 new hours that so beautifully reminded us we are given each morning. Another opportunity to notice, to be curious, to be here. And gradually I began to recognise that 'feeling' again. It was the same feeling of being at home that I knew as a child.

It must have done something to me that others noticed too. My mum used to say I was changing, and people at work mentioned that I seemed more 'at ease' with things. I certainly was, and continue to be. The practice has a lot to do with that.

Then, some months ago, I went through a rather difficult time. I was recovering from a sudden operation while also experiencing a painful period in my family, and there was quite a lot of sadness around. But somewhere in the middle of that sadness, a little seed began to grow. I felt invited to return to those childhood moments and share their simplicity: the beauty of just being, noticing what is here, feeling grateful, feeling connected... feeling at home.

The River of Choices came from that place. It is a children's book inspired by those beautiful times with my grandparents. The story follows a little girl, Kai, who explores the world with curiosity, kindness and a sense that everything belongs together. There are no mindfulness lessons in the story, but there is a separate guide for parents and educators if they want to use it in various ways, including mindfulness practice.

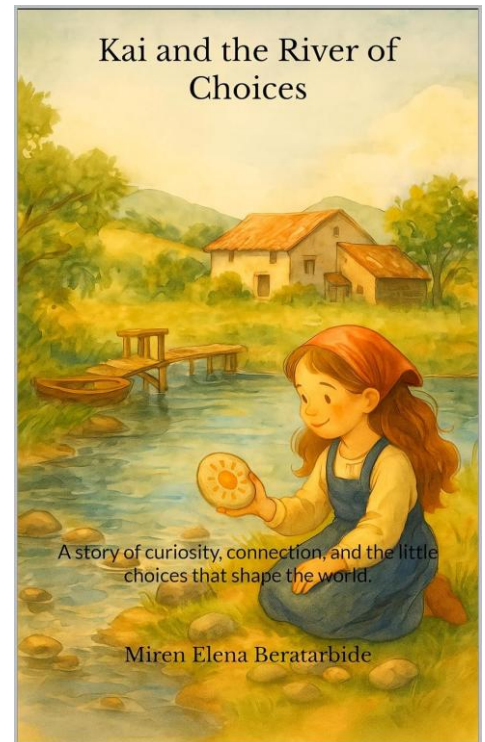
Kai simply notices, wonders, makes choices, sometimes gets things wrong, and carries on. And perhaps underneath it all is something very close to what we practise: to live with awareness, to meet life's choices with an open heart, and to remember that none of us journeys alone. Presence, curiosity, compassion, courage, acceptance and gratitude are there, but I hope they emerge through the story rather than being taught. Children — and perhaps adults too — can find their own meaning in it.

Writing it was part of my own practice, a way of remembering something I think I already knew before I had words such as mindfulness, true nature or interbeing.

The project is now slowly growing beyond the book into storytelling, art, music, stillness and participation. I hope it can become a shared experience where we don't just talk about interbeing, but perhaps feel a little of it together.

And any proceeds from the book go to support our Wild Geese Sangha ([Amazon](#)), with gratitude for a practice and community that continue to help me remember how to *just look*.

 **Miren (Jishin)** *Inner Sanctuary of the Source*



My Lamp Transmission – reflections from Lindsay Lumsden

Dear friends, Roland and Jane Ellen have asked me to share a little more about my experiences in Plum Village during Transmissions Week in March this year.

So, let's start with a highlights reel:

- From inside the dark Still Water meditation hall at night, seeing the lit-up Buddha statue outside the window
- The cacophony of frog songs from the lotus ponds (and the embarrassment on asking someone what kind of bird I was hearing!)
- The flowers and birds and warmth of spring, having left Scotland in winter
- Chatting with Phap Huu who is every bit as warm and friendly as you might think
- A cradle moon in the sky after the evening sit, and a red sun at rise and set (apparently to do with Saharan dust)
- Deep conversations with lay and aspirant Dharma teachers, OI members, almost-novices and monastics from around the world
- Being told by several monastics what a celebration it is for them to see lay teachers are being ordained who can bring the teachings out into the world in ways that they can't
- Brother Thien Chi, from Bulgaria, telling me how much he had loved being on Holy Isle for our retreat there a couple of years ago
- My roommates from Canada and USA leaving their lamps burning in our room for more than 24 hours until they burnt out. My own ceremony was on the last day, so I wasn't able to do that myself.

And then the ceremonies themselves. The opening ceremony was so beautiful and moving. It started with the inviting of the huge Dharma drum and a call and response with the bell – it let you know immediately that something of great importance was about to happen, every hair on my body stood on end! It was followed by prostrations to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and chanting the Heart Sutra. The rituals very much brought us in touch with our spiritual ancestors, the many people before us who had been part of these ceremonies.



We were required to have two attendants for our ceremony, and I was honoured to be an attendant for Anthony Leete, who had been my buddy throughout our mentoring process to become teachers. I was also glad of the opportunity to see a ceremony close up before my own came around. Anthony repaid the favour and was one of my attendants, alongside Jane Coatsworth who had been one of our mentors. Their love and support behind me were palpable. They literally had my back!

My ceremony was on the last day. I had felt calm and relaxed about it all week until the night before, most of which I spent rehearsing answers to possible questions Sister Chan Duc might ask me (of course, she asked the one I hadn't thought of!). So, I started off tired and nervous. But once again the beauty of the ceremony and the rituals carried me. Sister Chan Duc spoke about my insight *gatha* and the transmission *gatha*, given to me by the community – Sister Chan Duc and Brother Phap Ung used each ceremony as an opportunity to teach the Dharma. It was a masterclass to hear how skilfully they wove the *gathas* and people's individual stories into a beautiful teaching.

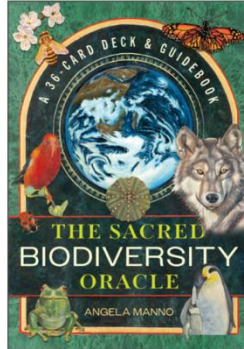
Receiving the transmission and the lamp that is a symbol of it, was both very moving and very humbling. Supported by the ancestors, my journey as a Dharma teacher has begun and I still have a long way to go.

Angela Manno

The first sentence of the First Mindfulness Training, “Reverence for Life,” moves me deeply and is at the core of who I am as an artist, mindfulness practitioner and activist: “Aware of the suffering caused by the destruction of life, I am committed to cultivating the insight of interbeing and compassion and learning ways to protect the lives of people, animals, plants, and minerals.”



My art is a reflection of looking deeply into the Natural world, which evokes in me profound love and gratitude. I create my icons of threatened and endangered species to express this revelation and to offer to others the opportunity to contemplate the beauty and uniqueness of each being that I depict.



My [Sacred Biodiversity Oracle](#) builds on my original artworks, allowing me to share my work in portable form with many more people. The accompanying guidebook allows me to provide information on the status of each being (the Wisdom aspect) as well as meditation exercises (Intuitive aspect) in order to evoke Compassion and a desire to protect vulnerable species. My

intent for these steps is to lead to *karuna*, sometimes referred to as “merciful action”. To enable meaningful, effective and compassionate action, the QR codes on each card lead to organizations that are striving to protect these vulnerable species that are clinging to existence.

Because of the insight of Interbeing, I know that my actions and all our actions have impact. We cannot help but have agency. As I write in the guidebook, whether we choose to cultivate this agency, strengthen it and use it is the challenge of our time.

I’m happy that I will be conducting an interactive workshop in the use of the Sacred Biodiversity Oracle on October 17th during the Ecovillage Findhorn Autumn Conference, [Healing Our World: From Despair to Repair](#). I hope some of our Sangha members will join me either in person or on the live stream.

The Next Newsletter, January 2027

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.

As we look at the next Newsletter in early January – yes, 2027 already! - 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 incoming colours, scents, and traditions of the autumn and early winter. The Earth will be resting again.

Roland Spencer-Jones *Compassionate Service of the Heart*

Jane Ellen Combelic *True Lotus Meditation*