

108 THINGS THAT I LEARNT FROM A WEEK AT GAIA HOUSE

- That toilet rolls can be recycled;
- The beauty of potted house plants and how well they can grow;
- That the slower I eat, the less food I need to be filled;
- In the removal of stimulation, how we turn to other items for stimulating: never was so much tea drunk by so few;
- In the silence what weight do words carry;
- The chatter of mind: like a barrage of radio stations all switched on at the same time;
- How this chattering can become quieter – and the deep relief at quietening;
- The strangeness of storylines: I had a daydream that the teacher was talking to my mum (she's dead) – and that's not the strangest of all...;
- The skill of a particular teacher – Christina Feldman – in explaining ideas and dealing with individuals;
- That I can survive for a week without chocolate, caffeine or puddings (I've done that before but it's interesting to know that I can still do it...);
- That underneath the energy can be exhaustion;
- The beauty of birdsong – just the same as the sound of a car: a sound arising, existing, passing away;
- Being surprised by how much this body hurt: hips, hamstrings, back (not to mention the generalised numbness in legs);
- Realising that I prefer the combining of a sit/walk/sit practice;
- Learning a new way of verbally phrasing metta (“may I be safe and protected – may I be peaceful – may I live with ease and with kindness”);
- How green the grass is – the magnificence of the trees – colour of flowers;
- After the ecstasy (such relief at arriving away from the stress of busyness), the tiredness (full-on nodding dog syndrome for at least first two days: a practice of falling asleep meditation);
- The joy of porridge: a bowl at breakfast with honey and half a banana;
- How distracted the mind is: trying to tame the almost untameable;
- How long forty five minutes (the length of each sit) felt like – curiously it felt much longer than when I sit for thirty minutes at home;
- The delightful taste of soup – a bowl in the evening with a rice cake;
- That mindfulness is easy to describe and extremely challenging to do;
- How much there can be a diminishing of nervousness over the days enclosed in this sealed environment;
- How strong my ego is as I resisted the an invited opportunity to stand during meditation if feeling drowsy – though on day four the I mustered enough courage to stand and it was a real relief from drowsiness;
- How quickly my right thumbnail healed after being bloodily torn on the day before retreating – six days later fully healed;
- Fewer fluctuations allowing a greater depth and nuance of perception (colours, sights, sounds, tastes, emotional waves);
- The joy of going to bed at 9.45pm night after night after night;

- How hard it all can be;
- How the work period (forty five minutes each day) encouraged a participation and enabled an integration of practicing into daily lives;
- The joy of spontaneous well-wishing towards strangers (a fruit of metta);
- Learning some new ways of saying the same old things;
- In the silence, a realising that I use too many words;
- How to walk slowly – so slowly – not more than a tenth of a mile an hour at most: and in the slowness of walking, an awareness of the texture of walk;
- A growing over the days of appreciation, friendliness and gratitude;
- Moments of calm becoming pools of stillness: so much efforting (in a non-effort way) to be in such places yet a radical change of normal life;
- Saying with metta: a realising of how much more is to be known and the potentials of deeper practice (the initial construct was “a realising of how little I knew and how shallow is my practice” – but then came the metta);
- That it’s all about love, peace and freedom;
- That the high standards I set for myself – and thereby other people – are destinies for failing;
- That there is a literal softening over the days: agendas, edges, personalities;
- That there is neither a self nor a non-self: it depends on the circumstances;
- How distracting making lists like this are from the actual practice;
- That I am who I am – and from this I am who I am, there is a realising of how much the I is changing and an understanding that this I has abilities which can polish the diamond within.....

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PS www.gaiahouse.co.uk for more details.

