

In this issue: Twice a year we pull together a variety of articles to be able to bring a piece of Dhanakosa to you. This issue we focus on the collective and individual practice of community. Please enjoy and thanks for being a part of Dhanakosa!

tangible community

I believe we spend a great deal of our time trying to be whom and what others expect us to be; very rarely do we live, we exist. Having recently returned from a tour of duty in Afghanistan, I realised I existed to work, and I rarely, if ever, did anything else. Having wholeheartedly embraced the military lifestyle for a number of years (and indeed I continue to) I found myself with an increasing desire to experience something different.

Whilst I was on tour a friend sent me a Buddhist text, an unexpected yet quietly inspirational gift, I enjoyed every word. I was already a vegetarian, I tried to be mindful and so much of what I read in that text made inordinate sense; I was intrigued to understand more. And so I discovered Dhanakosa.

Nestled on the banks of Loch Voil, Dhanakosa offered a sublime sense of peace and harmony

Calum Ferguson attended his first retreat at Dhanakosa earlier this year, and describes himself as big, bald, boisterous, and beautiful on the inside



that I had rarely, if ever, experienced before. Thus it was inevitable that it would only be a matter of time before I and my peers felt bathed in a rare contentment and quiet calm. It was marvellous to watch a group of disparate and diverse individuals join together to share experiences and confidences in a safe and secure communal environment.

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Of course as inspirational as Dhanakosa is, its magic is due in no little part to the members of the resident community who worked tirelessly to encourage an milieu of integration and communication. In concert, the people, the place and communal atmosphere provided an ideal respite through sharing or quiet contemplation. My sense of belonging, of fitting perfectly into a vibrant community, was absolute.

Scottish myth relates a tale of Brigadoon, a magical place which appears every hundred years, then disappears. Luckily Dhanakosa is as tangible and real as it is magical and its there for everyone to experience and enjoy. As for me, my journey continues and I'm already booked to return.§

community as practice

I remember sitting on the bench on the Dhanakosa patio when I decided to move up here, it was the end of a hillwalking retreat (my first one) and I was looking pensively over at Creag Mhor, rearing up beyond the sparkling loch. I don't know what my expectations of living in a community really were at that point, the very beginning, I don't think I had very clear expectations about it at all. I'm here now though, and have been for just over a year, and simply living in community has become a bigger part

of my practice than I ever expected it to be.

There's usually somewhere between 6 and 8 of us living and working together here and we have a pretty relaxed schedule. Every weekday morning at 8.30 we meditate together and keep silence until the morning meeting at 9.40 where we chant the 5 precepts, check in and plan out the day. Once a month, on the full moon, we have a puja (Buddhist devotional practice with the recitation of verses, precepts and mantras) and on Wednesday evenings we study together. There's enough time to follow up our own interests – walking, movies, kayaking or whatever.

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The current Dhanakosa team on the shore of Loch Voil. We like quad bikes, and none were harmed in the creation of this image!



I am nobody



Pasadini likes to close her eyes, and sit in dark rooms. She is from Canada, originally.

Having recently moved to Dhanakosa I am surrounded by people who don't know me very well. In the face of this, I notice a tendency to want to point at something and say 'This is me, this is how I am.' In this striving to be 'somebody', and caught in the midst of the stories I tell myself about that, I tend to miss what is actually happening both in myself and the world around me. So when I am able to really slow down, and notice, what I find is that I am able to get in touch with a sense of being nobody in particular.

Over the years I have noticed my own deeply entrenched stories of 'I am not worthy.' This is a very fixed and permanent idea of myself, of one who is at the core, unworthy, unlovable. But when I am able to truly embrace being nobody, I loosen the grip on needing to defend even a sense that I am not loveable, or not capable, that these things define who I am. When I am mindful of my present experience, I am aware that there is so much more happening than this static view.

Many of us repeat our shortcomings and anxieties to ourselves constantly. "Who do I think I am?" or "What's wrong with me?" Like a drum that beats out the rhythm

of our own inadequacy, we keep these ideas alive for ourselves, and become dulled to our moment-to-moment experiences of our bodies and our minds.

This, we keep repeating, *this is who I am*. Listen for those stories, those voices, especially in those moments when you feel like someone has wronged you. "How dare they?" or "Who do they think they are?" As we construct ourselves, we also construct others.

Now being nobody in particular can seem like a paradoxical concept, especially coming from a very individualistic culture. But it is not necessarily about fading into the background, and acting as though you don't matter. It is about not being so blindly obsessed with me, me, me, that you can't see beyond your own limited fixed view of yourself.

Each moment we repeat our stories to ourselves, we are conditioning the next moment to actually believe them. This is the simple, and profound teaching — that which we dwell on, we become. And this is not about being any particular way in the moment, necessarily, but in being with what is present whatever it is, with kindness, with openness, giving it space to arise, and to pass away in it's own time.

So how do you become nobody? By coming back, with mindfulness, with kindness, to the totality of each moment. Then we begin to see through our solid sense of our self. By simply being, we simply become nobody. §

"By simply being, we simply become nobody."

practicing letting go

In 1997, Acharashraddha came to Dhanakosa on her first retreat (she was then known as Judith Tomlinson — she was ordained in 2011). While on that retreat she overheard that there was a need for more yoga teachers, and she offered right away. Ever since she has been coming up to Scotland from Blackburn, where she lives.

When asked why she was excited to be asked to lead retreats here, Acharashraddha says she sees it as "an opportunity to practice generosity." "It's cause you can get all caught up in likes and dislikes," she says, "but you need to be able to fully respond to each individual." In order to really meet people where they are is to work on moving beyond oneself, and a way of practicing compassion, she reflects.

An awareness of the transformative aspects of offering others the Dharma keeps her inspired. "As a retreat leader it's a precious opportunity to be able to step up to the mark," she says, "and to do that feels like a big responsibility. As in giving the dharma to people for the first time, who come in here not knowing anything, and it is our job to give them a flavor of it. When I came to Dhanakosa it changed my life forever, and I want to be able to give that same opportunity for things to turn around in another person's life."

At the same time as she aspires to be available and meet people, she is also conscious that she does find it difficult at times. There was one particular retreat, she remembers, when she was feeling particularly reflective and quiet and was finding it difficult to have to put her own needs aside, but "then I just have to go beyond myself a bit so that I can be out and be

sociable." One way she does find to take time to relax is to sit and watch Columbo when she is at home, she adds jokingly.

While she does find it "challenging to be 'up front', especially if you are not feeling in top form," she always looks forward to be in the "stunning landscape of Dhanakosa," with its changing weather, and also appreciates the great team and community. As an aside, she also loves the Beetroot and Rose Cake that Prajnapiya, our resident cook, makes for most of the retreats. "It's absolutely stunning," she says. §

Acharashraddha lives in Blackburn with her partner Pramodana and is an Iyengar yoga instructor.



'community as practice', continued from front cover

The atmosphere in the community is supportive and friendly but with 8 disparate characters living in close proximity, there are inevitable difficulties. One of the things I was told a lot before and after moving up was how living in a practising community really throws you up against yourself and for the longest time I didn't have a clue what that meant. "I can see how I'll be thrown up against other people," I thought, "but I don't see what that has to do with me." As it turns out, the revelation of yourself, to yourself is sometimes subtle and other times sudden. I've certainly found that because the backdrop of my life changes less, my everyday experiences show up in more relief. This has a variety of effects: I notice myself get angry, irritated or frustrated, I notice too that this passes. The same with happier feelings, noticing their transience though enables me to greet them all with a more open, cheerful equanimity.

Living in community you see your reaction to things, and in your reactions you can see fragments of yourself. Ideas you may have had about who you are can be

altered or broken down and any emotions that you are feeling are much harder to escape from. In this way, you get to know yourself much more intimately. The wonderful thing being though that all of this is lived through in an environment of kindness and support. Something that has become very clear to me is the humanness of humans. It sounds obvious but it's easy to forget that we all go through difficulties, at different times we all experience pain and happiness, loneliness or comfort. I feel very much that this is an opportunity for growth and feel very fortunate to live among such a harmonious and friendly community but we are all still practising. Living here can feel hard. We're not enlightened yet. With practice at anything you get better though right? And we're practising all the time...§



Sarah Ryan joined Dhanakosa in early 2011, and is our Retreat Facilitator Manager.



remembering dhanakosa

Have you considered remembering Dhanakosa in your will? Funding from legacy gifts can give an important boost to projects and developments, and ensure the long term vitality of Dhanakosa. To find out more see the **"Get Involved"** section on our web site: www.dhanakosa.com/gettinginvolved.htm.

peeling back the layers

I first came to Dhanakosa in 2010 for an Introduction to Buddhism & Meditation Retreat. From then on I did more retreats and got involved as a volunteer and also at the Glasgow Buddhist Centre where I eventually became

Working through our own conditioning is not the most comfortable of journeys, but I would say GRAB IT!

with them and attend the morning meetings where we would share how we are and what may be going on with our inner selves before tackling the working day. This part I really liked, as I really enjoy "peeling back layers" of myself within a small supportive group.

a Mitra. I was brought up in Glasgow so I'm no stranger to community. Being part of this new thriving thing called Sangha really was and still is a big part of my life.

I came back to Dhanakosa for two months in early summer this year to help fill in with different jobs as some of the community would be away on different occasions. I was invited in to meditate every morning

Being at the other side of the counter is quite different than being a wee retreatant. What I found here was a group of people that have to deal with change on quite a big scale; new retreatants and retreat leaders each week with different wants and needs, new volunteers, visitors, etc. All this along with keeping up their own practice. And now I was part of this! What a chance I had been given. The term of spiritual practice was starting to unfold for me.

I found that I was doing a lot of self inquiry. Truly looking at my own mental states and reactions felt quite refreshing! Merely sharing how we are while working and living together is actually a simple concept. Working through our own conditioning is not the most comfortable of journeys, but I would say GRAB IT! Being able to turn and face something that is challenging whilst in supportive surroundings is a great gift. So being witness to it whether at Dhanakosa or at the Glasgow Buddhist Centre is very liberating and gives me a great sense of belonging and inclusion. The so called captains of industry could be tearing a wee leaf out of this book and find themselves with a more productive and healthier workforce! §



Pat was recently a long term volunteer at Dhanakosa. She currently resides near Loch Lomond.



notes from the directors's desk



I am writing this on the eve of the first Going Deeper Hillwalking retreat. I am looking forward to this retreat, partly because I love sharing both the hills and the Dharma with people, partly because my first ever retreat 18 years ago was a Dhanakosa hillwalking retreat, and partly because I am pleased that Dhanakosa

is offering "going deeper" retreats (in the programme for the first time in 2012). Going deeper is the invitation to take that next step into the great unknown of ourselves that the Buddha's words have been inviting people into for the past two and a half thousand years. As well as going deeper with hillwalking, you will see going deeper with yoga, and a retreat called "The Fire of Awakening", which is a going deeper level retreat focusing on meditation and Buddhist reflection.

Before I start the retreat I have to meet Mike Fong, our designer. Mike washed up at Dhanakosa five years ago offering his services in return for a period of refuge from the chaos of life, and has been working with us ever since. Most of our design we do in house, but Mike still does the main programme design. I am pleased with

both the look and the content of next year's programme. As well as a broad, accessible and creative range of introductory retreats, we have ample opportunities in the regulars programme for people to study and practice with some of the very best of Triratna's teachers.

Quality teaching throughout our programme is a strength here at Dhanakosa, and for this we are deeply indebted to the wider Triratna Buddhist community. In 2013 we will be working with fifty four teachers to deliver forty five retreats, not to mention the retreat organisers and volunteer cooks who will be supporting these events, as well as the additional Sangha events we host for the local Triratna sangha in Scotland. Although our core teaching team of five hold the backbone of what we do, it would simply not be possible to offer such a wide range of excellently delivered retreats, and all on donations, if it were not for our ability to draw on such a wide range of experience and maturity of practice that being part of a much bigger Buddhist movement offers.

Finally, I would just like to say a few words in praise of our team here. It's now twenty years since Dhanakosa first started, and living and working here remains a challenging and transformative enterprise for everyone. Over that time thirty people have given their time and energy as community members. And Dhanakosa is lucky to have such a fine bunch as the current crew. §

ordination report

It's now about 3 weeks since I touched down at Glasgow airport after 4 months cut off from the outside world in the very beautiful mountains of southern Spain and I'm still slowly adjusting to what is, for me, a new life. Not that what I've come back to is substantially different – Dhanakosa is much the same, the tasks at hand are much the same, Eddie the cat still treats me like a rather unsatisfactory member of his staff.

What's most different in my experience is that the person who returned after 4 months of reflection, meditation,

ritual and study is not the same as the person who left. We talk about ordination as a process of spiritual death and rebirth but these are just words – the experience is actually quite a humbling, challenging, maybe even traumatic re-aligning of everything that your mind has built up over the years about who you are, what you're capable of and how far you can take your practice.



Priyadasa- Servant of kindness

I don't know where this new person is going to go but I'm looking forward to the journey! §

retreat highlights 2013

- 1-7 mar in spacious awareness, wisdom unfolds **reg**
led by smritiratna
- 29 mar-5 apr this being, that becomes **triratna**
led by dhivan
- 5-12 apr opening to life- buddhist tools **intro**
led by acharashraddha
- 26 apr- 3 may painting and meditation **intro**
led by jutika

check www.dhanakosa.com for our full 2013 programme of retreats

