

In this issue: Twice a year we ask recent retreatants to write articles so we are able to bring a piece of Dhanakosa to you. This issue we focus on the value of things money can't buy! Please enjoy and thanks for being a part of Dhanakosa!

golden silence

I wonder if this resonates with other "Regulars" returning on retreat to Dhanakosa? For me it's a series of heart-lifting affirmations. Leaving the main road to dip down under the bridge feels like a commitment. Twisting along by the loch, my senses are tuning into the glen, to the season, to this exact moment. At last I jump out to swing open the gate and welcome the mountain air on my face. This is the place!



I enter the porch; redolent of that special smell... what is it? A vague delicious lingering of Dhanakosa cooking, incense and damp boot mud? Now I am greeting old friends, checking in at the reception table and something has happened to the back of my neck: it's softened, a familiar spaciousness has opened up. I'm breathing differently, sliding into the space which is Retreat. All this happened most recently for me on the Total Immersion retreat, my second time on this deep spacious fortnight of Paramananda's inspiring teaching, meditation, poetry, movement, rambling... and silence. A wealth of golden Silence, which has no price.

As that silence settles gently over us on Sunday evening, I feel secure, knowing what we will sustain for the next 12 days: the warmth of communal living, sharing space, sharing chores, sharing food, in wordless closeness. From now on, no polite banal exchanges are needed to stay in friendly contact. No one is going to break into anyone else's train of thought - or more likely as the retreat deepens, sensuous abstraction from thought.

However difficult it may be wrestling with yourself, you are surrounded by the tacit support of kind people. You cannot put a price on that.

In this particular silence, I had a special experience. The news (awaited since the day of our arrival) came of the birth of my second grandson in Slovenia in the early hours of 9th February. I announced his "First Breath" by putting a note on the board. Although far away, I felt contented and connected. I was sharing this joyous moment with those around me - especially the grannies! Their hugs and smiles expressed far more for me than predictable words. I would choose to share good news again in silence. It resonates more powerfully.

From now on, no polite banal exchanges are needed to stay in friendly contact.

I know I sound euphoric. No-one pretends silence is easy, containing your seething emotions and mood shifts, unexpressed. But the skillfully planned retreat offers plenty of outlets: meditation reviews, chanting and puja - some quite exuberant! Soothing stretching movement work is on offer. You can pace along the loch shore into the wind or climb up through the sodden moss-hung trees to the snowy hills above. You can share a reflective moment with Eddie (the resident cat), exchanging an ear-scratch for one of his wise enlightened blinks.

Meanwhile, the light eases back a few moments each day. The February rains, mists and snows are ever changing the light over the loch and trees and ridges. The landscape communicates in serene silence. Thank you Dhanakosa for all these riches! §

Claire Easingwood was introduced to Dhanakosa in 2009 by coincidence. Hillwalker, wood sculptor, counsellor, former teacher, aspiring meditator. Like many others, Dhanakosa has become not just a beautiful place of refuge but a spiritual second home.





dhanakosa stories

The first time I led a retreat at Dhanakosa was before Dhanakosa was called "Dhanakosa" – the storehouse of treasure. Geoff (now Aranyaka) had recently bought a hotel (Ledcreich House) along with 16 acres of land as a retreat centre for the Scottish Sangha – mostly folk from Glasgow.

Geoff was living part-time on the land in a yurt and part-time in Glasgow where I met him occasionally with my children and his partner's children for football. I casually mentioned that I was looking for somewhere to lead a tai-chi retreat with my students, some of whom were attending events at the Glasgow Buddhist Centre. He suggested I could use Ledcreich House as there wasn't, as yet, a full programme. That's where my Dhanakosa story begins, and it has gradually transformed my life.



The place and the people have grown on me over the years; the stories multiplied. Since that first retreat when Geoff showed me around the land, I've led and been on many retreats, sometimes as many as five in one year. My mitra ceremony was led by Smritiratna while I was on the team supporting an Introduction to Buddhism retreat. Dhanakosa has become my spiritual home and a percentage of any money I have after I die will be donated to the centre. Each time on retreat, I feel a deepening in my spiritual practice. Whenever I arrive, the first thing I do is walk the boundary of the land - the custom of 'beating the bounds' has existed in Britain for well over 2000 years.

For me this is a walking meditation that I first do alone, noting the changes such as new trees, moisture in the soil, the level of water in the burn, new plants in the garden, under-floor heating in the shrine room, a clear cut in the forest, the new extension, a wood chip boiler, edible fungi and greeting new members of the community. For the last ten years, on the first full day of a retreat, I have offered a guided walk around the border

of Dhanakosa – particularly for retreatants who haven't been here before – to give them an orientation, places to explore, the country code, etc.

Each time on retreat, I feel a deepening of my spiritual practice.

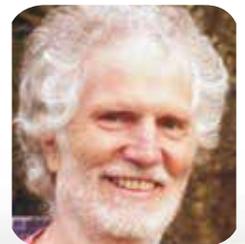
Starting by the pond I teach owl vision and encourage everyone to walk in silence and to walk at the pace of the slowest walker. I begin the story of Dhanakosa with a potted history of the valley as a thin place and as much as I know of this never ending story.

Moving East, we pause at various places for more story: "there's the wee oak tree we planted last year in memory of Manjusvara..." We stop below the solitary retreat hut to read the sign that says "Go no further". When the walk is part of the programme with everyone participating, we include some basic Buddhist teachings en route.

From the East we go South, by the wee burn along the Eastern border, then along the front where I point out the bramble bushes, and the sewage system (to dispel the mystery of strange noises at night), then further South to the loch shore where I teach early morning tai-chi; I talk about herons and otters where the west burn flows into Loch Voil and offer warnings about swimming.

Next we walk North upstream by the burn, through the community gate and I point out the wee garden hut which was my home on many retreats, and the community shrine room built by Ajitasena from one large ash tree; continue uphill to Tara's cave, the waterfall and oak grove; and finally to the highest place on the Northern boundary with views over the loch. When there's enough time, the walk ends with a just-sitting meditation back in the shrine room.

Two years ago, when Manjusvara died from a stroke, coinciding with my leading a Wolf at the Door retreat – with a theme of impermanence – Dharma teachings and Reality were married, and my going-for-refuge and request for ordination shifted gear, deepening tenfold to a clear resolve and commitment to study and practice. For me the Dhanakosa story is alive and kicking. I look forward to leading more retreats at Dhanakosa this year. §



Larry Butler was born in Illinois and has been living in Glasgow since 1981. His day job is teaching tai-chi in healthcare settings including the Maggie Cancer Care Centre where he also facilitates a therapeutic writing group.





appreciating the ordinary



by Nayaka

All of you reading this will, I have no doubt, at various times in your lives, have made decisions that place non-material values above personal wealth. Whether it is the purchase of a slightly more expensive product in a supermarket because you feel fair trade, organic, or local is more ethical than alternative products, the giving of money to charity out of sympathy for the welfare of our fellow human beings or other inhabitants of the planet, or even the turning away from whole career paths to pursue relationships/professions/lifestyles that for us are more meaningful than the alternatives that may have presented themselves to us.

I want to draw attention to these decisions we make because I want to rejoice in them, to rejoice in our ability to respond to our lives in a way beyond simple personal material gain. I'm not trying to make some sort of anti-capitalist point here. Many of the great benefits we experience in our societies are undoubtedly derived from the flow of money in our economies but the fact that we can connect with non-material values, with deeply human and relational values, is a great thing. This empathy or resonance with others, with life itself, is a wonderful quality of being human, and a foundational quality of an effective spiritual life. There is freedom in it.

I would also like to draw attention to what I believe is another very important, far reaching and perhaps surprising and not unrelated step towards freedom. That is appreciation of the ordinary. Much of the drive towards consumption and acquisition in our lives is driven by the forces of desire and aversion that so often play out, with varying degrees of subtlety almost all of the time. They could be said to permeate our lives. Appreciation of the ordinary is a pleasurable step away from desire and craving that can be found literally anywhere. If you are reading this you probably have been on retreat at Dhanakosa, so you probably have some idea of what I am talking about when I talk about the radically empowering affect of appreciation of the ordinary.

This empathy with others is a wonderful quality of being human.

It's important to remember it's available to us all the time (though the special conditions of retreat do help familiarise ourselves with it). At this point I will not only suggest that this is a radically transforming personal practice, but one that can change the world. Our power to tackle key issues like global climate change arguably lies in our ability to moderate our consumption of resources. Appreciation of the ordinary empowers us to do just that by freeing us just a little, from relentless desire and helping us live simpler, more satisfying and less materially driven lives. §

community news

Dhanakosa's new website!

In recent months we relaunched our website (www.dhanakosa.com). You can now make your bookings online. Next time you're online, take a look at our brand new layout and design. Make sure to follow us on Facebook too!

Departures

In the midst of the transitions of Spring, Mike left Dhanakosa in February to head up north, starting a new chapter of his life up in the Black Isle.

In April, we said a fond farewell to Pasadini who is moving to sunny Spain to get involved with the Sangha in Valencia.

We wish them both all the best in their next endeavours and will miss their presence in the community.

Arrivals

We have welcomed Siddhimala to the team back in January, who has joined us from Wales.

Upstairs community remodel

In January, we knocked down some walls and built some walls so we now have a new dining room and kitchen space upstairs in the community. It looks fab and we were able to rejig rooms so Siddhimala could move into a 'brand new' bedroom (formerly the community dining room!).



Come live and work at Dhanakosa!

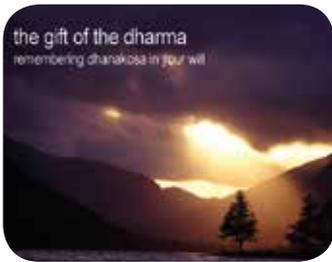
As we all know, the only constant in life is change! We are on the look-out for new members of the residential community. Keep an eye on the 'working at dhanakosa' page on our website for more information and details on how to apply:

<http://www.dhanakosa.com/working-dhanakosa> §





appreciation from dhanakosa



Dhanakosa is extremely grateful for those who leave us legacy gifts. They give an important boost to projects, such as our biofuel boiler, and also ensure the long term vitality of Dhanakosa. Just recently, Sue McDougall remembered us in her Will. Sue was a regular retreatant at Dhanakosa, often volunteering with us and helping out in the gardens. Knowing her love of gardening, we will use her gift to improve our grounds by buying new garden benches. We are honoured to remember Sue in this way.

To find out more, see the “**Giving to Dhanakosa**” section on our web site: www.dhanakosa.com/giving-dhanakosa

things money can't buy

It's funny how things work out – when I was approached to write this I wondered about the coincidence of the timing. I am materialistic to a degree but I have also had a couple of occasions in my life where I've realised how little possessions are needed and how little importance they should hold. One of these occasions has just occurred to me.

... by the end of the week I felt like part of a community.

I was in my early thirties and was convinced by a good friend to pack in a good job, sell my car and go away travelling – it might have been the best and craziest thing that I've ever done! I left everything behind that I thought I couldn't live without – if it didn't fit in the rucksack then it got left behind and it was a remarkably liberating feeling.

The overwhelming memories of that time aren't the temples we visited, the ruins we saw or the places we stayed, but the people that we met and spent time with. Their kindness, their genuine interest in our adventure and their offers of help whether we needed it or not! It felt

like community spirit to me – a world community where people were reaching out to each other.

Last year I came to Dhanakosa for the first time for an introductory retreat to Tai Chi and meditation - I was a total first timer on all counts, I like a challenge!

My initial nerves were soon settled when I started meeting the other people on retreat and the members of the Dhanakosa residential community – by the end of the week I felt like part of a community. There we all were, a very diverse group, brought together in a common enriching experience.

This year has brought new challenges already with complications after surgery, but it has also brought a reminder to me of the important things in life, the truly valuable things. My friends and family rallied round and, while the cards and flowers were lovely, it was the time spent chatting and laughing that have lifted and carried me through. That's what I appreciated the most – something so valuable but which money can't buy!§

Lou Lydamore is a Yorkshire lass who came to Dhanakosa for the first time in July 2013 for the Tai Chi and meditation retreat. She's a world traveller, bass player, nature lover, poetry reader, with a cracking sense of humour to boot!



retreat highlights

- 20 - 27 june** writing into summer **intro**
led by ratnadevi, larry butler & linda france
- 18 - 25 july** the path of freedom **intro**
led by balajit & vidyabhadi
- 15 - 22 aug** call of beauty **reg**
led by mahasukha, osadha & jutika
- 12 - 19 sept** going deeper - awakening to reality **reg**
led by amoghavira, acharashradha & pasadini

check www.dhanakosa.com for our full 2014 programme of retreats

