



fundraising update

Regular volunteer Steve Hornby undertook a big challenge in 2015, to climb Mount Kilimajaro and raise money for Dhanakosa. Steve says "it was one my greatest experiences in life, so far. It taught me a lot about myself. I could not have reached the summit without the support of our porters, our guides, my friend and climbing partner Cristina's planning and medical expertise, and without all the kind comments from everyone who sponsored Dhanakosa on our behalf resonating in my ears giving me both physical and mental energy when it was most needed."



He raised over £700 via BTMyDonate which goes into our Development Fund to help us continue to improve what we can offer here. Recently we replaced our 4x4 with a more reliable vehicle and we are planning a new office and meeting space which will give more group space for retreats and improve community and working space for the resident team. If you are taking on an adventure or activity and would like to fundraise for Dhanakosa please get in touch.

living at Dhanakosa

People often ask me if it was a difficult decision for me to move here, a year and a half ago, away from home and family in South Wales to my new life at Dhanakosa. And the simple answer is no. Although of course it was sad to say goodbye to friends and family, I knew it was something I just had to do - an irresistible yearning to go forth into the unknown and commit myself more fully to the Dharma life.

For many years I have cherished this yearning to live together in a community with fellow practitioners who share my spiritual ideals. A number of years ago I wrote in my diary this quote from Shantideva which expresses it well: "Trees do not bear grudges nor is any effort required to please them. When might I dwell with those who dwell together happily?"

The first time I travelled up the road in the taxi - past Loch Lubnaig, down the Glen road with that beautiful view of the expanse of Loch Voil - I fell in love with the place.

Now I often reflect on how lucky I am and a deep sense of gratitude wells up in me.

To be living here, with these people, is such a precious opportunity. The joyous words of the Dhammapada come to mind "happy indeed we live... friendly amid the haters... healthy amid the sick... content amid the greedy... feeders on rapture shall we be like the gods of brilliant light."

Every week I see people coming here and going through a similar process of falling in love with the landscape and getting a taste of something very special... a taste of freedom, a different way of life where we can learn to live together in harmony. §

Ben moved to Dhanakosa in September 2014. He enjoys playing guitar, music, dance and chanting.



retreat highlights 2016

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|-----------------------|---|
| 15 - 22 jul | going deeper - women's meditation going deeper
<i>led by Dassini and Pasadini</i> |
| 23 - 30 sep | simply being meditation regulars
<i>led by Tejananda and Pasadini</i> |
| 30 sep - 7 oct | going deeper - elemental awakening going deeper
<i>led by Nayaka and Siddhimala</i> |
| 14 - 21 oct | compassionate communication introductory
<i>led by Vajrasara</i> |

check www.dhanakosa.com for our full 2016 programme of retreats



In this issue: What gets in the way of meditation, opening up our hearts to the landscape, fundraising and community news. Enjoy and thank you for being a part of Dhanakosa!

modern hindrances

At the beginning of a retreat several people always say that they struggle with meditation. Some might even say that they can't meditate. Usually by the end of the week some progress has been made. However, just as common is the report that since the last retreat meditation just hasn't happened. If you recognise this you're not alone. But what can you do?

I believe the answer lies in the nature of modern culture. These meditation practices developed in a traditional culture with norms and assumptions very different to ours. In the past these practices made perfect sense. But plunk them down in the late modern era and they don't fit so well. Hence our familiar difficulties. The Buddhist tradition speaks of '5 hindrances', so these difficulties could be called 'modern hindrances', which traditionally were not significant concerns.

Let's start with hyper-individualism, something quintessentially modern. Us moderns are free floating solitary selves knocking about in a world of alien strangers. Reflect on this - what are most heroes like in modern novels and movies? Rugged individuals, always go their own way, need no help, always victorious. If you want a world view that loads the dice in favour of anxiety and depression there you have it!

This also makes us extraordinarily 'head bound'. We can't maintain our heroic solitude without splitting off from our dependent body and heart. Traditionally a basic level of integration was presumed but now we have to work for it. We are likely to get on a whole lot better if we approach meditation more as a whole being, appreciating that we're embedded in society, nature and history.

Another classic modern hindrance is a tendency to approach life 'instrumentally'. This is the means-ends thinking, the economic approach where we are always looking for the payoff. Such an approach is evident in most books on meditation. 'Meditate for Happiness', 'Meditation for Better Relationships' etc. When we meditate like this, with one eye on some short term prize, our attention is divided from the start. Our meditation won't unfold naturally in the way it needs to. Try instead appreciating awareness, each meditation, for its own sake and I expect you'll notice a difference.

Lastly we have distractedness. Never in our history have we been more stimulated: The marketing industry, electronic 'devices', the internet, on-demand TV... If we allow our attention to be pulled this way and that way throughout the day, then meditation is likely to be an uphill struggle. So as well as valuing our awareness for its own sake, we also need to be vigilant for these highly distracting stimuli and introduce gaps in the day when we put down our gadgets and spend some time in a more peaceful environment.

Recently I've been addressing these modern difficulties, collectively called the Malaise of Modernity, through my work with Live&Flourish. My wish now is to make these reflections also available to Buddhists, perhaps on a retreat. I'd love to hear if that interests you. §

Dhiraka is a meditation teacher and mentor concerned with human flourishing in the modern world.

*In 2016 he is leading a Painting and Meditation retreat, 29 April-6 May.
www.liveandflourish.co.uk*



legacies

We have recently been left a generous legacy of £20,000 by a friend of Dhanakosa in appreciation of what retreats can give. We plan to use the money for something special and will let you know more in due course.

Legacy donations such as these allow us to continue to grow; to support and inspire; to teach and practice the Dharma.

Please consider including Dhanakosa in your will. There is a booklet enclosed with this newsletter giving more information and do get in touch if you have any questions.

Thank you



reflections from a first time retreatant

I awoke full of excitement, today I would go on my first retreat - Everyday Mindfulness. I just knew I was meant to go; I was going to find my path; I'd lost my way; I'd given up my job; I wanted an answer to the question 'what is my life purpose?'

I was confident that I knew why I was going and what I hoped to get out of it, I was organised and raring to go. However, by the time I arrived at the gates of Dhanakosa some of my confidence had left me replaced by a small quiet voice asking me all sorts of 'what if' questions. Not feeling very brave I switched off my phone and leaving it in



my glove box headed to the front door to begin my week. The week passed quickly and on the last evening we had an idiosyncratically Dhanakosa style Ceilidh. We were all asked to think of things we'd like to contribute. Some chose to sing, others to dance and mime, read poetry or juggle. I chose to share the experience of my first retreat with the group.

My approach to the retreat had had an almost childlike quality. I fully immersed myself determining that I would only get out of it what I was prepared to contribute. I was excited by each and every new experience and almost everything was new or I gained a new perspective on something I had already experienced. During the week I had many 'light bulb' moments and although I had been so sure I knew why I was there even that was to change.

I got much more from the retreat than I had anticipated. I spent time learning to meditate and began to develop mindfulness in my everyday life and I loved Qi Gong by the side of the loch every morning at 7.30, while I am not normally a morning person it was a real joy. I found I liked the personal writing we were asked to do and I especially enjoyed being with my fellow retreatants, sharing our

thoughts and ideas. I have never before felt so accepted for who I am and that I was not being judged, additionally there was never any pressure on me to 'do' or 'not do' anything.

I brought knitting! I hadn't knitted anything in 20 years and thought it a 'mindless' task I could do if I was on my own a lot. How wrong was I? My early knitting had very few mindful stitches, however, as the week progressed I could see them multiplying as each little stitch was worked mindfully with love for my, then unborn, grandchild.

Like every other new experience there were some

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challenges and for me two in particular stood out. Over the week we had to observe periods of silence the duration of each period increased as the week progressed. In the silence I tried to stay present.

In the silence I struggled and after our longest period of silence I wrote this for my group: "In the silence my mind did athletics and like an energetic hamster it would run and run and run. I would catch up with it and try to stop it, calm it, quieten it, but it was a hamster covered in soap and each time I held it still for a few seconds it leapt from my hands running and running and running."

But sometimes in the silence I held the present moment, held the moment accepting of my novice attempts and failures ... no, not failures just opportunities to try again. In the silence I knitted... I listened to the clicking of the needles, I watched the little cardigan grow with every stitch, and in each and every stitch a little love resides.

My second challenge was my body's reaction to vegan food... who knew? The food at Dhanakosa was beautiful and I bought the recipe book. However, during the quietness of meditation I feared my rebellious chi might cause me to levitate! Something I hadn't prepared for and caused me a little embarrassment.

Epilogue: I have a beautiful grandson Leon who will look very dashing sporting his Dhanakosa cardigan. I continue to practice mindfulness and meditation. I'm looking for a Qi Gong class but I'm currently using a DVD. Finally, at Dhanakosa I discovered that it was my spiritual path I had lost and I am now beginning to find my way. §

Mo Dockrell is training as a mediator and currently works for a charity in Edinburgh as their Director of HR & Operations.





notes from the director's desk

by *Nayaka*



At the start of Maitreyabandhu's new book "The Journey and the Guide" he talks about the situation we find ourselves in as human beings by saying, "Firstly, we are born; we did not choose to be born, we just found ourselves in the world...".

This 'finding ourselves in the world', with whatever sense faculties we have, whatever self awareness we have, and whatever capacities and predilections we have, is a most remarkable thing. It is almost always (perhaps always) accompanied by some sense of something more; an ungraspable intuitive response to "being" that we often use the word 'spiritual' in association with.

How we choose to interpret that experience, and what we chose to do with it is a different matter. But, it is there. Retreats are an opportunity to explore this intuitive response, to feel it more deeply, and to explore what in our lives helps us contact it more consistently.

Maybe there are structures that help; concepts, images, activities. Or more subtle factors – difficult to adequately put into words. All these things are the business of retreats. As a Buddhist centre we use traditional Buddhist concepts and structures as well as intertwining

these with a wide range of other supportive structures, all in the overall context of 'retreat'.

One of the special qualities of Dhanakosa is the environment. A world where the dominance of the human-made can be relatively easily set to the side enabling us to open up our sense faculties to the "more than human" world.

In opening up our senses, we open up our hearts, and soften the rigid delineations of inner and outer, or self and other. It's not just a pretty view, it's a creative engagement with being.

On Hillwalking retreats when I am out walking with a group I often ask people to reflect on whether they experience themselves as walking through the landscape or, whether they experience themselves as inhabiting the landscape. To what extent do we maintain a sense of separateness, and to what extent do we participate in the unfoldment of our lived world?

These are not doctrines or dictats, but invitations to explore the nature of what it is to be alive. To see if we can live more fully; breathing in the air, resting on the earth, and in companionship with our fellow beings.

The Dhanakosa team lead Introductory and Going Deeper Hillwalking retreats over the summer months and this year we have a new Going Deeper retreat called "Elemental Awakening" in September exploring our relationship to the landscape.§

community news

Team arrivals and departures

We said a sad goodbye to Ruth in March 2016 who has been with us for a year and half as Maintenance Worker. She is moving on to live in the south-west and start a women's community. We'll miss her cheery smile and willingness to work outside in all weathers!

We are currently recruiting for a new team member to join the community. The ideal candidate will be a Mitra who has asked for ordination or an Order Member, and will have a serious interest in community living and right livelihood as practice. For more information and to apply visit our website.

Pictured: the team at the end of 2015, from left to right - Darren, Acharashraddha, Ben, Siddhimala, Nayaka, Monika, Abi, Dharmavasini and Ruth.

Open Day

We held our annual open day on June 11th and enjoyed welcoming local people and many folk who have been on retreat here and brought along family and friends. A big thank you to everyone who came and all our volunteers who helped on the day.

