

In this issue: The focus is on appreciation and gratitude in a Buddhist context. **What are you grateful for?** Please enjoy and thanks for being a part of Dhanakosa!

gratitude for all *by Nayaka*

I consider myself extremely fortunate to be able to live and work at Dhanakosa. Dhanakosa can, of course, be very challenging. It's by no means an easy option, so I don't want to romanticise it. But there are a great many things I appreciate about it; things that I experience as benefits, and that I have a sense of gratitude about.

The traditional word for gratitude in the Buddhist Scriptures is *katannuta*. Roughly it means recognising what has been done for one's benefit, and, is an important quality in the spiritual life, and a quality of the Awakened mind of the Buddha himself. Sometimes we experience gratitude in quite specific ways. For instance, I felt grateful towards Dharmavasini for sorting out the car breakdown cover. I'm quite disorganised about these things but when the car broke down I was saved from the consequences of my disorganisation! I directly benefit from this.

Can I experience gratitude simply for positive, kind, helpful actions, even if they have nothing to do with me?

I also had a response of gratitude toward Larry for getting the sheep out of the gardens this morning, and to Priyadasa for being vigilant about sorting out our water supply problems today. It was not so much that they were helping me personally, but they were participating in something I care about – Dhanakosa. When I start to look at them, my days are full of other people performing simple actions to the benefit of things and people I care about. How fab is that!

But, how often I take it for granted. When I think of this

I realise that to limit that positive emotion of gratitude to personal benefit is too restricting and narrow, when there is a vast well of positive emotion to be tapped into by appreciating the positive actions of others in a more selfless way. It's true that there is still self interest in benefits received by people or things I care about, but it's a step in the right direction. Can I experience gratitude simply for positive, kind, helpful actions, even if they have nothing to do with me?

Gratitude does not have to be expressed just towards people. After the Buddha's awakening he is said to have looked back at the tree he sat under, and felt grateful towards it! I also often feel gratitude in situations where it is not so obvious who, if anyone, is responsible for the benefit received. I'm writing this on a sunny day in the middle of March. The spring sunshine is glancing off the snow capped peaks of Ben Vorlich and Stuc a chroin. It's glorious. I just feel lucky to be alive. I often get that feeling in contact with Nature.



In the appreciation of simple beauty I can just be grateful for that experience. It's a sense of being taken out of myself, and yet being more fully myself at the same time. Maybe you don't have to call it gratitude. But, that is what it feels like. A blessing perhaps. But without the blesser! Gratitude for the gift of life, and for the possibility of positive emotion. The limit really is in my ability to be open to it. Sometimes, of course, I'm grumpy, miserable and preoccupied, and gratitude seems a long way away. But sooner or later someone helps break the spell. Or the cloud just lifts. Gratitude is a great thing. Let's be grateful for it!§



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. To find out more see the **"Get Involved"** section on our web site: www.dhanakosa.com/gettinginvolved.htm.



taking the time

I found the Dhanakosa community without looking for them. A good friend of mine happened to share with me their own experience of a meditation retreat they recently completed at the centre. I read the centre's year programmer and booked my place on a beginner's introduction to meditation.

I had no previous experience of meditation, and I considered myself a genuine beginner. With no expectations or preconceived ideas of wanting to get something out of the experience, I was entering the retreat with a simple thought of open mindedness and a humble gratitude to my teachers.

The Dhanakosa community has been established in what I believe is the most appropriate context for meditation. The ancient Scottish landscape provides a raw stillness and natural beauty that gently allows us to engage with it, this remoteness and stillness helps us to develop our self-awareness of being human.

The weekend retreat was a lovely introduction to the positive possibilities we can all achieve from taking the time to sit with ourselves and learn how to cultivate an awareness of how we actually feel. The mindfulness of breath was taught to us in a simple and relaxed manner, with a very clear intention. We were being made aware of something we probably all take for granted in our every day life. For me, I felt that the connection we were all making with our own breath, visualising the energy and light being taken into our bodies reinforced the bond between the Mind, Body and Spirit. I felt grateful for my being alive.



Guido Maclellan studied architecture at Glasgow School of Art, has a passion for design and making beautiful, simple buildings and spaces. He believes in A More with Less philosophy. He practices marshal arts, (Kung Fu) and enjoys road cycling.

Like most of life, the more effort you make the deeper and more rewarding the outcome. Dhanakosa taught me many things, one key lesson I learned is that meditation is something that takes time, we need to have courage to continue to be happy to sit with ourselves when we live in a culture of constant stimulation and dependency on other peoples company. It is not a quick fix solution to our problems. It is as gradual as nature, seasons come and go, colour, tones, light all change, nothing is permanent. I believe that if we are aware of and accept that we are living in the now, not the past or future, we will feel our life becoming more enriched with kindness, gratitude, and self respect.

Like most of life, the more effort you make the deeper and more rewarding the outcome.

I'm grateful to Dhanakosa for making me aware of a pathway that I can take self-responsibility to travel or not.

It is well known that the buildings and the spaces we inhabit directly influence our mood and behavioural patterns. The shrine room at Dhanakosa is a special space, it is simple, there are no distractions, the space has a clear intention, it is a smaller scale landscape for a group of like-minded people to share in a communal pursuit of mindfulness and loving kindness. The positive energy, light and love generated in this space felt unlimited.

Dhanakosa is a very special place. I am pleased I have found it. The community is relaxed, friendly and very welcoming. The leaders are happy to share and help, there is no pressure and each individual can choose how much they wish to do. I have done, and will continue to recommend a retreat at Dhanakosa. I plan to return again soon. Thank you.§

biofuel update

In an effort to move away from our reliance on oil for heating and take advantage of the government's Renewable Heating Incentive, Dhanakosa installed a biofuel boiler for the retreat centre in January.

The boiler burns wood pellets, made from waste wood and wood harvested from plantations from local suppliers. In order to make room for the boiler, we remodeled the old "refill" shed with a new roof, and installed a shipping container next to it for the pellet storage.

The boiler burns very efficiently and while we are still figuring out some of the details, like how often to order pellets, we

are very happy with our new addition at Dhanakosa.

And a special thanks to a substantial legacy gift in 2011 from Rodney, a friend of Dhanakosa, which helped to offset the large set-up costs.§



Adding pellets to the storage container, with the Basset colleague looking on.





Advice for Fellow Hut-Dwellers

I would recommend to go with the flow,
 Not to plan, not to structure, not to want, not to know.
 To set yourself standards can only be tough;
 "I'm not walking, not reading, not sitting enough!"
 Have faith that the shape that it takes will be right,
 And know this will change with each passing night.
 Take heart when you're hurting and chewed up and sad,
 That nothing we feel can ever be bad.
 Thoughts will dissolve and others take their place,
 If we give them attention and kindness and space.
 We are as the clouds, ever-changing in form,
 And clear skies will frequently follow the storm.

Helen Worthington



The vajra sheilin hut, the solitary hut up the hill.

walking in the hills

I'd been on an introductory hillwalking retreat a couple of years before and really enjoyed exploring the fantastic countryside surrounding Dhanakosa. I've also been on study and meditation retreats and was keen to explore my practice through a combination of these different elements.

I arrived to find a great group of retreatants with a wide range of walking, meditation and dharma experience. The retreat programme alternated walking days with study/meditation days which gave everyone a chance to dry out and rest between walks and time to settle into meditation practice and silence.

I found walking in silence in a group very liberating and supportive.

Over the previous year I'd really been looking at my own practice and how to develop that; and I'm discovering that for me it's very tied up in being active, being outdoors and feeling connected with my environment and companions.

Each day's walking routes were chosen with an eye to the weather, and three choices of varying length and ascent. I chose Meall Na Dige to Meall Monachyle; Faradh Dubh (the black ladder) over to Fionn Bhealach, and Creag Mhor, the hill in front of Dhanakosa. They were all pretty challenging for me, interesting off-path walks in varying weather to places I wouldn't have gone on my own. The focus of all the walks was on experiencing the walking and surroundings rather than

"bagging" Munroes or being first to the top, so the pace was unpressured.

This was reflected in the alternate days with exercises in using the senses to focus on awareness. In the evenings pujas, mantras and stories were added to meditation in the shrine room. I felt like I really had space to explore my meditation practice and talk about it with a small group and one to one. Periods of silence in the retreat centre spilled over into the walks, I found walking in silence in a group very liberating and supportive.

I read these quotes from John Muir, the pioneer conservationist, and really connected with them and related them to my Buddhist practice:

"Climb the mountains and get their good tidings. Nature's peace will flow into you as sunshine flows into trees. The winds will blow their own freshness into you, and the storms their energy, while cares will drop away from you like the leaves of Autumn."

"In every walk with Nature one receives far more than he seeks."

I spent a week with a great bunch of people, as always the food was great and I'm coming back this year. §

Barbara Murdoch became interested in Buddhism about 14 years ago while stuck at home with a book and a broken leg, then got side tracked for a bit by babies. She works as a visual arts assistant and is currently enjoying a career break and bringing up two daughters.





notes from the directors's desk



By March you expect to be through the worst of the ravages of the winter. This winter we felt like we had got off lightly compared with recent winters, but the last blast of snow and cold has again brought water supply interruptions and threatened to close the road. All in a

day's work for the Dhanakosa team!

Planning work for the winter is always risky, but this year, Sarah and Dharmavasini, working with a team of volunteers, did manage to complete the redecoration schedule (including a repaint of the shrine room) and we completed the first phase of the biofuel boiler project. Chris did most of the management of this project and without him it would probably not have happened. Also I would like to thank James Smith, who did lots of preliminary research and gave the project the necessary focus back in the summer of 2011.

Dhanakosa's main activity is not the generation of energy,

but the provision of retreats, and encouraging people to explore, and make meaningful in their own lives, the Buddha's teachings. As government policies to deal with the financial crisis continue to bite into the pockets of ordinary people in our society we have been keeping a close eye on retreat bookings. Particularly we are aware that many of the poorest members of our society are being hit quite hard so I would just like to take this opportunity to re-emphasise our commitment to retreats by donation.

If you have lost your job, or are experiencing a cut in benefits, or other financial hardship and are feeling like you cannot afford to go on retreat this year, **please remember that when we say donations, that is exactly what we mean.** Once you have paid the booking fee it's up to you to assess how much you can afford.

Fortunately, bookings are still buoyant and many people are still able to give in line with, or even more than, the suggested donations. I would also like to thank those people for their generosity, not only on behalf of Dhanakosa but also on behalf of all the people who could not afford to go on retreat without the payment by donation. **This is the economy of generosity**, or the dana (Pali for generosity) economy.§

community news

Departures

In the midst of the transitions of Spring, the Dhanakosa community is also going through it's own changes. In February, we bade farewell to Sarah Ryan, who was our Retreat Facilities Manager for the past two years. And in March we said goodbye to Pranjanpriya, who was our Kitchen Manager these last three years, and who is headed to cook for Windhorse:Evolution and legions of hungry Buddhists in their Cambridge operation. Then in April, Jo Worthington, who many of you will know as the friendly voice at the end of the phone when you call

up to book on retreat, is heading South to Sheffield to work in the NHS.

We wish all of them very well in their next endeavours and will miss them all.



Arrivals

A hearty welcome to Monika Podgorska, of Nottingham (originally from Poland), who joins us as our new Kitchen Manager in April. We look forward to lots of great cuisine from her.§

retreat highlights

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|----------------|---|
| 14 -21 june | going deeper - hillwalking reg
<i>led by amoghavira & jutika</i> |
| 2 - 9 aug | dancing the unknown intro
<i>led by jayachitta & paramananda</i> |
| 11-18 oct | going deeper - fire of awakening reg
<i>led by nayaka & pasadini</i> |
| 25 oct - 1 nov | opening to life intro
<i>led by amoghavira, dharmavasini & pasadini</i> |

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

