



notes from the directors's desk



What would you do with £500,000? Or, more to the point, what would we do with £500,000.

It's true, there are still a few intrinsic material issues we would like to resolve at Dhanakosa; better water pressure and supply, improved

sewage management, replacement of boundary fencing and a few things like that. But we feel its time to start thinking about what the retreat centre could be like in the future.

Almost every week we are struggling to find single rooms for people with sleeping problems, avoid bunks for people with mobility issues, and retreat teams are having to be, let's say "creative" to get breakout spaces, body work spaces and just enough room to get everyone together. One way forward would be to just reduce the size of retreats. To let less people come. I'm sure we could charge those who did come more to get the required income to keep the project financially viable – but is that really what we want to do? Well, no.

Our feeling is that our economy is pretty stable at the moment, but as it is a dana economy (based on voluntary giving) the main thing we need to do to make the project work financially is maximise occupancy.

In this way those who genuinely can only afford to give less can still come, because the economics balances out overall. This tends to mean that we are a bit on the overcrowded side at times. What would a Dhanakosa look like with broadly the same number of people but a more spacious feel - an ambiance that better supports retreats.

We think this might look like a second shrine room, big enough to get a full retreat in more comfortably, or a second bodywork group, or even a full retreat doing light yoga or chi gung (the lawn is great, but let's face it, it does rain quite a bit and we cannot change that – oh yes, and there are the midges!)

And perhaps some new rooms, not to stack in more people, but to reduce overcrowding in some of the back rooms, remove bunks, and make better provision for single and twin rooms. Maybe we could have a new sitting area somewhere in the mix and a more spacious entrance way for boots and coats.

Ok, I'm just wetting your appetite. But what do you think? By the time you get this we should have posted some sketches, a vision statement and a project outline on our website. And, we are looking for feedback. £500,000 is already looking a bit tight, don't you think?

We are not going to get that kind of surplus from ordinary retreat donations. In any case we don't want to squeeze the finances so much we don't have the capacity for routine maintenance and just keeping the place looking good. And, we don't want to max borrowing and compromise our ability to manage our finances with our spiritual vision at the heart of the matter.

So this will involve fundraising, and individual sponsors who feel they can get behind the vision. For 25 years we have delivered quality Buddhist retreats on a donations basis, enabling thousands of people to benefit, many of whom have never been on retreat before or never meditated before and could never have come if not for the donations based approach to the centres economics. With all that experience, the project has never been stronger or more stable.

But what is it going to look like in the future?

retreat highlights 2018

- | | | |
|----------------|--|---------------------|
| 16 - 23 mar | dancing the unknown | introductory |
| | <i>led by Jayacitta and Vajradevi</i> | |
| 30 mar - 6 apr | dependent arising | triratna/regulars |
| | <i>led by Dhivan</i> | |
| 11 - 18 may | awake in the wild | going deeper |
| | <i>led by Amoghavira and Shraddhadharani</i> | |
| 27 jul - 3 aug | metta awakening the heart | regulars/meditation |
| | <i>led by Bodhipaksa</i> | |
| 16 - 23 nov | padmasambhava's invitation | triratna/meditation |
| | <i>led by Srisambhava and Vimalacitta</i> | |



In this issue: We discuss Buddhism and economics and hear from Nayaka about future developments at Dhanakosa. Plus tales from introductory and going deeper retreats and from a long term volunteer.

Utopia for Realists

500 years ago Thomas More, then Lord Chancellor of England, published his book "Utopia". In his book More denounces private property, advocates a form of communism, and describes the then existing social order as a conspiracy of the rich, who are greedy, unscrupulous and useless, and live like drones on the labour of others.

He suggests that instead of being worshipped, gold and silver should be used to make chamber pots! And work should be reduced to a minimum, with workers using some of their increased leisure time to attend public lectures before daybreak. It's difficult to imagine a modern-day Chancellor promoting such ideas.



And yet, no so long ago in the middle of the twentieth century, if you had asked John Maynard Keynes, at that time the most influential economist in the world, what the biggest challenge of the early 21st century would be, he wouldn't have hesitated for a moment before answering 'Leisure'.

Writing in the 1930s, speculating on the economic prospects on our grandchildren, Keynes assumed that the western standard of living would multiply to at least four times that of 1930 within a century. By his calculations, in 2030 we'd be working just 15 hours a week. What would we do with our spare time?

In fact by 2000, countries such as the UK and the US were already five times as wealthy as in 1930. Yet as we accelerate through the first decades of the 21st century, our biggest challenges are not too much leisure and boredom, but overwork or no work at all, or desperately insecure work, all of which bring stress and uncertainty.

And although overall we may be five times as wealthy

as in 1930, this has come at great cost to the environment, with increasing inequality of wealth and income, and a loss of community.

Few are able to fully develop their potential. Many experience a lack of fulfillment. We grasp after the consumption of more and more things to compensate for this sense of lack. But there are alternative, even utopian, visions for a different kind of economy and society represented in ideas, books, and movements around the world.

What might a Buddhist perspective bring to the world today to join these exciting visions and help provide everyone with a sense of community, a worthwhile job, and a sense of fulfillment, whilst protecting the environment?

Buddhism is about transforming self and world. New economic structures will be ineffective unless the forces of greed, hatred and delusion are countered by generosity, love and wisdom. Mind and world must change together. How do we help this happen?

That's what we will be exploring on the Utopia for Realists retreat.

Using short introductory talks and group discussions we will consider practically how money and the search for happiness impacts upon our lives, and how an alternative, realistic approach based on Buddhist values and practices might be built.

What would be a Buddhist approach be to work, to the environment, to inequality, to happiness, to income?

And how might we contribute to movements and alternative visions for change, making the most of our individual and collective skills and experience?

Vaddhaka, author of The Buddha on Wall Street, has been practising meditation and Buddhism for over 22 years and now spends most of his time teaching in Estonia. His main current passion is reading and reflecting on Buddhism and economics.



reflections from intro retreat



by Lorna Gunn

I drafted the story of my first retreat whilst on my second one – hillwalking – a week later. So there you go, I loved it so much I came back again that quickly!

My mindfulness and meditation journey started a year ago, after I arrived in New Orleans where I went to do my Masters and work for a local law firm. The months leading up to that move were pretty turbulent between one thing and other (it never rains but it pours as it were!) so when I saw a “Mindfulness for Lawyers” class advertised I thought I would go along.

I went to all the classes, took notes, thought about the content but never did the 10 minutes a day meditation at home, or the gratitude log. I was there to get stuff off my to-do list, not to put more on it.

I enjoyed University and my job. It is hardly a tough position to be in but I now know it was a classic Lorna pattern – work, work, work, do, do, do, crash. And the

minute I feel better – work, work, work, do, do, do. You know what comes next. Certainly it was all the work, work, work and do, do, do that got me to the point where those are the sort of dilemmas I have.

I wouldn't have got there without a work ethic and self-motivation. But everything comes at a price. For me this journey was, and is, about finding balance, accepting what is and living in the moment.

Being at Dhanakosa gave me the time and the space to reflect on the past year, and my life as a whole. I came with an open mind and an open heart and left with a warmed heart and a slightly achy body but with a real desire to treat that body as its own magical thing, rather than just something to carry my head around.

Acharashraddha's meditation instruction was world-class and the food was good. There was a sense of community and moments of companionship with my fellow retreatants which were just lovely.

And on that note I must sign off, I'm going to meet my new friend Jackie, a fellow Caithnesian, for a cuppa in Wick. We were roommates at Dhanakosa.

facing the demons...

I'm glad I didn't read the small print with the description of the retreat. Because I probably would have cancelled. Not because it didn't sound amazing. But because I thought I needed silence, lots of deep meditation and long solitary walks after a really stressful few months in a new managerial job.

It turns out that I had a transformational week full of laughter, lots of deeply political discussions and joyful rituals – all pretty full on and noisy at times.

And I ended up asking for ordination on the way back to London, which is not something I had planned at all.

The first session felt like we were a bunch of burnt-out activists who were just completely overwhelmed and paralysed by the challenges facing the world – political, social, environmental, and economic. Yet, we were also determined that retreating on to meditation cushion wasn't the answer either. As Buddhists, we have to engage.

At the end of the week an army of well-rested Shambala warriors were all ready to commit again to a project that will help make a difference.

I have signed up to support a literacy project for women in East London and yes, I have set up the standing order.

I wasn't just temporarily intoxicated with the beauty of the Scottish loch and the hills and taken in by our inspirational retreat team of Parami, Khemasuri, Ratnadeva and Frankiethe conditions just helped to clarify what I knew deep down inside of me anyway.

I had heard that Dhanakosa was pretty spectacular, both in terms of the landscape and the quality of the retreats. But it always seemed so far away from London and it is. Which is good. Because the journey starts with a journey and ends with a journey - time to calm the mind and set your intentions on the way out and reflect on what the heck happened up that mountain on the way back.

While I would normally always implore people to read the small print, just sometimes it helps to just go with the flow.

Gabi Thesing is a mitra living in East London



volunteering at Dhanakosa...

When my children left home last year, I mourned their absence, but I also welcomed the sense of freedom and choice that I anticipated would follow. After two decades of nappy-changing, and frantic school runs, I was excited to have the time and space to follow my own adventures. In particular, I was looking forward to committing fully to the Buddhist path; I downsized from our family home and quit my job in the NHS.

Mortgage and commute-free, I imagined that this new way of being would create the peace and simplicity that I needed to go forth. However soon I found myself once again in sole charge of another; this time my mother, who had been diagnosed with an aggressive form of Alzheimer's. I did not resent this responsibility, yet I found that meditation and community practice quickly became sandwiched between a hectic schedule of doctor's appointments and meetings with carers.

So when my friend Monika (now Upekshanandi), asked whether I would be able to help out as a volunteer at Dhanakosa, whilst she was ordained, my heart leapt. I knew that this was Monika's way of helping me to find the conditions that I needed to deepen my practice and meditate on and off the cushion.

My stay at Dhanakosa was to last 3 months and my role was as an all-round helper, getting stuck into everything from hoovering, to cutting the grass, and even a bit of ad hoc plumbing. Once a week it would be my job to give the cooks a rest and cover in the kitchen. This last task was both exciting, yet also daunting. For me, cooking had always been a necessary evil, wedged in between a hectic daily schedule, and I had always anxiously tried to attain perfection, pedantically following recipe books to the letter, in constant fear of gastronomic disaster.

Yet strangely, most of my greatest lessons at Dhanakosa happened in the kitchen. I began to relish exploring textures and flavours in a playful, mindful

manner; slowly I started to relinquish my desire for culinary control. Instead, I embraced and rejoiced in the connections and conversations I was having as I worked.

I brought to mind the Korean Buddhist monk, Jeong Kwan, who had been cooking meals at the Baekyasa Temple (near Seoul) since the age of 17. Kwan prepared the food as a way to clarify and energise her mind, as part of her meditative practice.

She believes that each of us plays an integral part within Orchestra of life. Even simply cooking a meal is an essential and meaningful part of the score, creating melodies and working with the rest of the musical composition.

Her words encapsulated what I had discovered in the kitchen at Dhanakosa. On retreat, living within a spiritual community, this metaphor was fully actualised. Each of us had our own discrete role, just as a violinist or a cellist does in an ensemble.

Yet our roles came together to form a pattern of fluctuating - sometimes discordant, sometimes harmonious- but constant melodies and sounds.

I was suddenly able to perceive my spiritual practice, not simply as isolated introspection, but as part of a wider and much more communal experience.

In a transformative way, I started to break down the dichotomy between spiritual practice and my everyday life to form something much more expansive and enriching. In my opinion, this epitomises the power of retreats, they allow us the opportunity of carrying out daily tasks, but within a spiritual setting, therefore fusing the two spheres into one Buddhist path.

by Deborah Creed



updates on our new office

Our brand new Dhanakosa hub is almost complete and we are hoping to move our office there in the next couple of months. This is a very important project for the community and also for the retreats as it provides an additional room that can be used as a group meeting space.

Thank you everyone for all your support to keep Dhanakosa going!