



# reflections on nature

"I only went out for a walk and finally concluded to stay out til sundown, for going out, I found, was really going in." - John Muir

This autumn I'm returning to Dhanakosa, to a role including working as gardener. I first moved to Scotland to live and work at Dhanakosa back in 2014 and spent a little under two and a half years in the community in a range of work areas. I left the community in early 2017 and moved nearby in the glen, working elsewhere and continuing links of study and friendship.

The period away gave me space to get to know myself better outwith the busy life of Dhanakosa and take the time to think about how and where I want to live. While working at a university library I also studied for a gardening qualification and explored a lot more of Scotland. Living nearby my connection with the glen and Dhanakosa remained strong and I missed the place and living in a practice community.

My own journey with Buddhist practice has been about an opening up of heart and mind, to a softer, kinder, more connected experience of myself and the world. I come to feel less isolated and more interconnected, with people and place – and relationship with landscape is a big part of this path for me, alongside beauty and creative expression. The landscape here at Dhanakosa feels part of me, in some elemental way, it's here that faith and confidence in a life practicing the Dharma has grown roots.

I love to take part in the retreats where we are encouraging connection with the elements of place as a way of deepening our practice of meditation and understanding of the Buddha's teaching. In both the retreats I've helped with this year – a new Going Deeper called Awake in the Wild and one of our Hillwalking retreats – we have encouraged folk to simply 'be' in this wildly beautiful landscape of the retreat centre grounds and glen, finding their own spot to which they can return over the course of the retreat.

The invitation to sit and stare, to watch the progress of an insect, the dance of leaves or the wind playing on the surface of the loch, can transform our experience. We can drop out of our thinking mind and into a more embodied experience, embedded in a landscape that floods our sense experience.

For myself being outside can help me to feel a softening of my hard edges and the distinction between outside and in can become increasingly fluid. The bigness of the outside of loch and mountains here helps me find a corresponding sense of big inside – of the spaciousness of awareness and compassion. I feel deeply privileged to be returning to contribute to the growth of this special place, where we can each find our own way to touch the earth of what feels most meaningful to us.



*Abi lives in Balquhiddar Glen and loves to swim in the loch and potter in the garden.*

## retreat highlights 2019

- |                |   |
|----------------|---|
| 11 - 18 jan    | <b>the fire of awakening</b> going deeper<br><i>led by Amoghavira and Balajit</i>             |
| 8 - 15 feb     | <b>opening to life</b> introductory<br><i>led by Amoghavira and Padmadarshini</i>             |
| 1 - 8 mar      | <b>gay men's retreat</b> introductory<br><i>led by Maitrinaga and Daibhidh</i>                |
| 26 apr - 3 may | <b>facing the demons</b> triratna/meditation<br><i>led by Parami, Khemasuri and Ratnadeva</i> |
| 12 - 19 jul    | <b>women's meditation retreat</b> triratna/meditation<br><i>led by Pasadini</i>               |

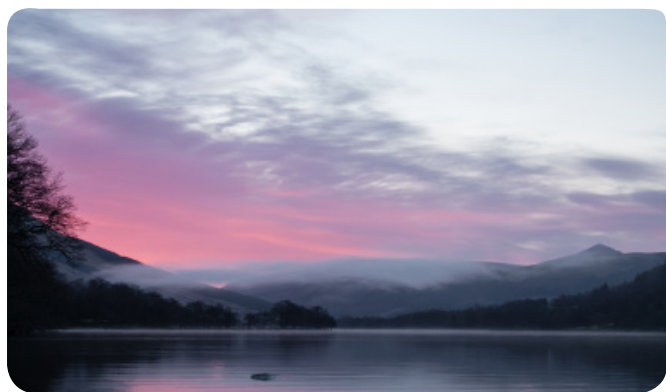


*In this issue:* We discuss Buddhism and nature and hear from Nayaka about future developments at Dhanakosa and next year's programme. Plus tales and haiku poems from introductory and going deeper hillwalking retreats.

## awake in the wild

'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 off like autumn leaves.' - John Muir

When we started running retreats at Dhanakosa we



quickly realized the impact the beauty of the Highland landscape was having on retreatants. As a way of helping people connect with the landscape we began running Hillwalking retreats where we took folk out into the surrounding hills as part of their retreat experience.

Over the years we have refined the programme of these retreats to increase the emphasis on nature awareness as a meditative practice. This year we premiered a new retreat in the programme which we called Awake in the Wild. This was a Going Deeper retreat (with more meditation, ritual and silence than on an introductory retreat) where we built an outside shrine and spent most of the retreat outside either meditating or exploring the immediate landscape.

'Seeing form with the whole body and mind, hearing sound with the whole body and mind one understands it intimately.' - Dogen

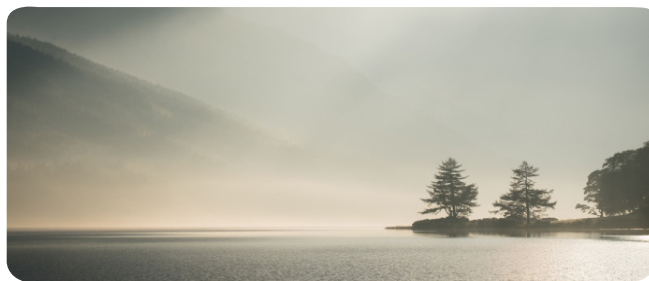
We emphasized engaging all the senses, engaging the whole body and mind, in our appreciation of the landscape to the extent we begin to feel connected to it. What can get in the way of this sense of connecting is our constantly chattering mind. On retreat we usually find the stream of thoughts and preoccupations slows with the daily practice of meditation and silence. This

coupled with nature awareness practice can lead us into a sense of deepening absorption with nature as preoccupations, at least temporarily, fall away.

'First you will perceive about you a strange and deepening quietness, a slowing down of our feverish mental time. Next you will become aware of a heightened significance in the thing at which you look. It seems as though the barrier between its life and your own has melted away.' - Evelyn Underhill

Often people who come regularly to Dhanakosa speak of a feeling of coming home or returning to their spiritual home. Though recognizing this sense of belonging, to me it's not related so much to a place as a state of being. Wherever I feel deeply connected; it might be where I feel immersed in the Sangha (the spiritual community) to the extent I feel I'm partaking in something beyond the boundaries of myself or when I'm immersed in the landscape to the extent that I feel a sense of 'oneness' with the hills, lochs, rivers and woods, it's then that I feel I have come home.

'When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe.' - John Muir



Next year we are again expanding our Nature Awareness themed retreats. As well as running our Hillwalking retreats and the Awake in the Wild week we are introducing a Walking and Nature Awareness retreat where we'll explore the glen on low level walks.

*Amoghavira was ordained in 1982 and has helped lead retreats at Dhanakosa since 1992. He loves being in the mountains and this has led to a passion for landscape photography. He now lives in the village of Callander, about 15 miles from Dhanakosa.*







# reflections from an intro retreat



Sitting still, for the first time in a long time.  
Trust.  
Trust the process.  
A wobbly first few days, feeling rudderless, restless and dog-tired before I arrived.

Commit. Try. Open up to the possibilities.

Mist draping itself across the loch, later swimming, blissfully, in the rain, immersed in the deep, dark, silky arms of the water.

A collective, a community for the week. A beautiful, poetic, knowing flow of actions, smiles, laughter and understanding between us all, somehow. A feeling that this week, in this place and with this space yet focus,

we are the 'best' we can be, maybe the best anyone can be ... But then, what, really, is this judgement of 'best'? Peacefully, gently, imperceptibly, I begin to let go of judgements and start to simply 'be'.

Soaring along mountain ridges as we walk ... is that an eagle circling high above? And then, the world in miniature becomes fascinating too: orchids, sedges, tiny frogs loping and lolloping over my feet. The glen is magical. I want to take it home. Maybe, in a way, I can.

Sitting still, properly, peacefully, deeply patient, for the first time in a long time. Trust.

*Jon lives in Bath in the UK, with his partner (a Dhanakosa regular) and their cat. Jon was encouraged to come along to Dhanakos by his partner ... and is grateful for that.*

## hillwalking and meditation...

It might sound contradictory with Buddhist teachings of being detached, but going on retreat at Dhanakosa is addictive. I don't mean that in a craving and dependent way, but in a very appreciative one. Ever since my first visit at Dhanakosa the place moves me. It almost feels there is something in the air (besides the notorious midgies!) that nourishes me on so many levels.

I haven't found that anywhere else yet. It might have something to do with the amazing landscape Dhanakosa is surrounded by. The stunning landscape is a big reason for me to come to hillwalking and meditation retreats.

I like exploring the Scottish outdoors, learning about the environment, experiencing the stillness and yet constant changing of nature.

It's the perfect retreat for experiencing spaciousness around you - which is very appealing for me, living in a crowded and small country as The Netherlands - and start opening up to it internally as well.

It feels like there is space to breathe. Although the hillwalking retreat is an active one, I like the emphasis on slowing down, stopping and staring, allowing yourself to just be and open up the senses. During the retreat this is being integrated in the teachings as well as the meditation sessions, which is, from my perspective, the essence of the whole retreat.

Experiencing this, greatly organized, in good company, with amazing food, in silence and laughter and with lots of swims in the loch, makes me one happy lady.

I come home grateful, energized and inspired and as soon as I have the chance I'll book my next hillwalking retreat. When I think about it, I don't think Dhanakosa is addictive. I just think I am a fan and - especially when it comes to a hillwalking retreat - it is really hard not to be one.

*Marieke de Groot's first contact with Buddhism and Triratna was on a hillwalking retreat at Dhanakosa in 2010. She has been involved with the Movement in different ways since then. She started the Young Buddhist activities in the Netherlands and sometimes helps out with communication-based work for the Order. Every now and then she writes for [www.thebuddhistcentre.co.uk](http://www.thebuddhistcentre.co.uk) and the Dutch online 'Buddhist Daily'. She keeps going on retreats multiple times a year and loves Dhanakosa so much she travels over from The Netherlands almost every year.*



# haiku poems inspired by being on retreat



by Chris Arning

## IT'S THE LITTLE THINGS

at silent dinner  
attuned to your tahini  
i pass it – you smile

## RUMBLINGS IN THE HARA

imperturbable  
serene – till the lunch bell shakes  
then... EGO... awakes

## UNSKILLFUL MEANS

waterlogged moss grove  
wrong move – boot straight through  
first dukkha, then truth

## BUDDHA OF THE MICRO CLIMATE

slug on reed:  
all's subject to clinging  
no blame in the slime

## CONIFER HONOUR GUARD

pace for pace with you  
striding through this glen  
watched by wise firs

## DOWN FROM AN SIDHEAN

sangha on the ridge  
communing with gorse bhikkus  
panting's our mantra

## HUMBLE PAGODA

quartz on top of bark  
just found flotsam from the glen  
our humble stupa

## FROG BODHISATTVA

we've halted en route  
carol stoops down tenderly  
hop to salvation

*Chris is an Angry Buddhist who meditates to calm the Asuras inside. He is a blogger, poet, calligrapher, semiotician. He is writing a sci-fi novel pivoting on consciousness, transcendence and Buddhist technology in the age of the Post-Human*



## notes from the directors's desk

Like many parts of the country we have been enjoying a long hot summer here at Dhanaksoa. With the added advantage that it never really gets too hot! Just warm enough to enjoy swimming, and dry enough to knock back the midges.

One of the lovely things about living here is the strong sense of seasonality. As soon as we pass lammas (reckoned as early August) there is a palpable change in the sense of the landscape.

The swallows become restless, and the hillsides and meadows take on yellowing as early autumn establishes a felt presence.

One of the constant pieces of feedback the natural world provides, is the message that whilst it may be OK to make change (change is after all inevitable and continuous), but when we assert ourselves onto the world around us, we should do so with sensitivity.

As well as enjoying the weather the team have been enjoying the new office and starting to reorganise the community house to create a more pleasant and conducive living environment.

This project will continue into the autumn and hopefully the next building project, the shrine room link build, will also be completed this autumn. As well as creating a pleasant entrance and transition space this project should reduce congestion and further enhance disabled access.

Behind the scenes over the spring and summer Amoghavira has also been working away on the 2019 programme. By the time you get this, bookings should be open for 2019. Though most of the programme will be familiar you will notice a few changes.

Our theme of exploring nature / landscape and practice continues with Awake in the Wild – going deeper (May 10th) the normal scattering of introductory and going deeper Hillwalking retreats, and a new retreat; Walking and Nature Awareness (25th October).

Retreats with a bodywork focus also remain an important part of the programme as do the normal scattering of arts based retreats. Though check out the introduction of a gong deeper photography and meditation retreat; Zen in the Lens (11th October). Facing the Demons (April 26th) with Parami returns to the programme as does, after a long break, the Gay Men's retreat (1st March).

And, what better place to explore the teachings of Padmasambhava than the retreat centre named after his mythical birthplace with; The Root Verses of the Six Bardos (15th November). We look forward to welcoming you.

