



notes from the directors's desk



One of the things I love about living at Dhanakosa is the intensity with which I experience the passing of the seasons. Once you pass lammas (the third cross quarter festival of the Celtic year, noted as early August) the inexorable slide into autumn becomes obvious. The rowan berries are reddening up, the first leaves are

starting to yellow, and it's the season for gathering wild mushrooms. In stable weather conditions it's also the start of the season of mist hanging over the loch in the morning creating the most magical atmospherics.

It's also when we announce our new year's programme. Your printed copy has been sent out with this newsletter. The programme is now live on the website, and we are open for bookings. Next year, as normal, we have a full programme. We are especially pleased to be able to offer two retreats that look at the social and economic aspect of the modern world through Buddhist eyes. Parami (a popular retreat leader and teacher who normally leads our women's new year retreat) is teaming up with Khemasuri to lead a retreat for folk already involved with the Triratna Buddhist Community called "Facing the demons – Dharma for troubled times" in July. In November Vaddhaka, author of "Buddha on Wall Street" is leading a retreat in our introductory programme in November called "Utopia for realists – exploring a Buddhist vision of our economic future".

After all Buddhism is not only about "personal development", it also recognises our interconnectedness and emphasises how we can positively contribute to the wellbeing of the world.

I am also pleased to welcome back Bodhipaksa of wildmind.org and ex-Dhanakosa manager who is leading a meditation retreat in our regulars programme called "Dhyana and insight" in August. Bodhipaksa's refreshingly accessible approach to teaching is likely to be welcomed by anyone wanting to deepen their practice of meditation. The full programme also includes all our familiar favourites. Further information and bookings are available online, or feel free to phone our office and discuss what retreat may be appropriate for you.

We are hoping the next phase of building work at Dhanakosa will also begin sometime in the coming spring. We are looking forward to seeing our new office and laundry building, and a new meeting room go up. These will be timber buildings on the northern edge of the current buildings and should considerably improve the quality of life in the community house and improve retreat access to small group space. It's been quite a few years in the discussion and planning phase as it turned out to be a very complex project with lots of objectives and not enough cash available to hit all of them!

Next year we will have been in Balquhiddie Glen for 25 years and it's great to be thinking in terms of long term strategic development of the site as a resource well into the future. I remember nearly 20 years ago, at a time of much less certain future for the project, sitting up by the burn on a summer day listening to the rush of the water and looking up into the blue sky above feeling really open hearted towards what Balquhiddie Glen and Dhanakosa were giving to me. I remember reflecting on the precious opportunity Dhanakosa offered to people and just how easy it would be for all this to fall into the hands of a private individual and be lost to thousands of future retreatants. So, I would just like to finish by rejoicing in everything everyone has given over the years not just to keep Dhanakosa alive, but to enable it to continue to prosper and flourish.

retreat highlights 2017

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| 21 - 28 apr | everyday mindfulness introductory
<i>led by Ratnadevi and Larry Butler</i> |
| 30 jun - 7 jul | going deeper - women's meditation regulars
<i>led by pasadini</i> |
| 21 - 28 jul | facing the demons - dharma for troubled times triratna
<i>led by parami and khemasuri</i> |
| 4 - 11 aug | dhyana and insight regulars
<i>led by bodhipaksa</i> |
| 24 nov - 1 dec | utopia for realists - exploring a buddhist vision of our economic future introductory
<i>led by vaddhaka</i> |

DHANAKOSA Buddhist Retreat Centre, Balquhiddie, Lochearnhead, FK19 8PQ, Scotland
Tel: 01877 384 213 E-mail: info@dhanakosa.com Website: www.dhanakosa.com



In this issue: Meet Dr Ambedkar, find out about the Karuna Trust and hear from Nayaka about the 2017 programme. Plus tales from a Going Deeper retreat and community news. Enjoy and thank you for being part of Dhanakosa!

a story of a peaceful revolution sixty years ago

Who are the world's great reformers, the heroes and heroines who have shaped the world, taken society in a new direction? There are many people who have had an enormous influence on society, people you may never have heard of, people who quietly, peacefully turned the course of history. One such person was Dr Ambedkar. Not only did Dr Ambedkar change the history of India, he also influenced the way Triratna practices Buddhism today all over the world.



Hindu society is divided into castes with the Brahmins at the top, and the Shudras, or labourers, at the bottom. 'Untouchables' or 'the scheduled castes', are even lower than Shudras, being outside the caste system altogether. They

are called 'Untouchables' because any contact with them pollutes so-called 'caste Hindus'.

Castes are fixed. They traditionally determine your job, who you marry, who you are friends with, where you can walk, eat, drink, whether you can get an education, own land or go to the temple.

Dr Ambedkar was born in 1891 into an 'untouchable' family. He had access to education because his father was in the army, and he became the first of his caste to complete higher education. Through sponsorship from a liberal minded Maharaja and a great deal of hard work, he managed to complete a PhD at Columbia University, a D.Sc at the London School of Economics and he was called to the Bar at Grey's Inn. He became 'the most educated man in India'. He could have settled down to live a comfortable life in any country, but he had a burning problem, a quest to end untouchability. He tried political, economic and social strategies to end untouchability,

to bring India into the modern, independent age. He became the first Law Minister and drafted the constitution of India after independence. In the end, though those strategies helped, they didn't go far enough. 'Political revolutions have always been preceded by social and religious revolutions... the emancipation of the mind and the soul is a necessary preliminary for the political expansion of a people.' He saw that caste is created by mind, has its roots in the mind, is a disease of the mind, and 'what the mind creates, the mind can undo'.

In 1956, sixty years ago this October, after much thought and exploration, he publicly embraced Buddhism taking 400,000 followers with him. With this act, he set loose something more than political change. He introduced people to a new vision of their own potential. They could cut out caste at its root in the mind, they were no longer 'untouchable'. They had the confidence to access education, make use of their political rights, believe that they, like any one in the world, are capable of the boundless love, wisdom and energy of Enlightenment. He introduced people to a vision of a truly democratic society based on freedom, equality and love. This was more than rhetoric, even now Buddhists in India are likely to have higher rates of literacy and employment of any group in India.

Sangharakshita, the founder of the Triratna Buddhist Community, was teaching in India at this time and became involved in working with those newly converted to Buddhism. This period was influential on the development of his thinking. "After my contact with Dr Ambedkar...I became much more aware of the social dimension of Buddhism, in fact the social dimension of existence itself."

There is a lesson for all of us in this story. Buddhism can transform more than an individual, it offers a solution to the troubled world around us. To find out more about Buddhism in India and how you can be involved, visit 'India Dhamma Trust' on Facebook or The Buddhist Centre online.

Vajratarā lives and works at Tiratanaloka retreat centre in Wales where she helps run retreats for women training for ordination. She is also Chair of the India Dhamma Trust, a charity that raises money for Dhamma work in India.





karuna: transforming self and world



The Karuna Trust has been initiating social work and Dharma projects amongst some of India's poorest and most disadvantaged communities since 1980.

Patrick Harper is Karuna's Supporter Care Officer. He writes: "Karuna's work is based in the teachings and ethics of Buddhism. We believe this gives us a uniquely radical critique of caste and an ability to act as a fearless and compelling voice for people affected by discrimination, helping people from ostracised communities in India increase their choice and opportunities through education, women's empowerment and training for improved livelihoods.

In our work with our Indian partners, we aim to break down the traditional roles of funder and beneficiary to exemplify an attitude of equal partnership and mutual respect. In 2014/15, we supported projects across 9 states directly impacting more than 90,000 men, women and children and more widely benefitting a further 600,000.

In our 35th year, we have set out our new goals and strategy for the future: over the next 5 years, we want to directly transform the lives of more than 375,000 people from the most marginalised communities in India and Nepal.

By continuing to build greater independence and sustainability, as well as beginning to work with partners across four new states in India - and, for the first time,

expanding our reach into Nepal - we are confident that this ambitious goal is achievable.

Karuna believes that lasting social change can only happen when prejudice and ignorance are transformed and people are seen as truly equal. With the help of our supporters, we want everyone, regardless of caste, gender or background, to have the opportunity to meet their potential, so that it will one day become the norm for Dalit and Tribal communities to work and live equally alongside everyone else."

Most of £1.5 million each year that funds this work is donated by thousands of individuals across the UK who were introduced to Karuna on their doorsteps by volunteers from the Triratna Buddhist Community. This form of fundraising, where fundraisers meet prospective regular donors face-to-face, was pioneered by Karuna in 1982.

Since then Karuna has been developing such fundraising as a context for engaged Buddhist practice, as these volunteer fundraisers explain:

"I would go out hard, smiling and confident and I would struggle to connect with the householders, which was painful and eventually I would get in touch with my vulnerability and hold it - then beautiful connections would manifest."

"I loved the challenge of meeting completely new people, of being in the situation of having no idea what might happen next and yet staying open to this"

"Karuna door-to-door appeals are a very effective spiritual practice. Over the years I have seen many people change significantly as a result of taking part in them. I would therefore urge all those who have our work in India at heart to support Karuna in this way. " Sangharakshita (founder of the Triratna Buddhist Community)

Find out more about Karuna and donate here: www.karuna.org

community news

We said a sad goodbye to Acharashraddha in August who has returned to live in her home town of Blackburn. She brought a lot of kindness to the community and a warm welcome to all the people she met on retreat. She'll be returning to Dhanakosa to lead several retreats a year so we look forward to seeing her regularly.

And here we are all in our new t-shirts for the 2016 Open Day!





going deeper, walking slowly

I had been on my first Triratna retreat earlier in 2016, following which I had made the not unrelated decision to leave my job in the high pressure environment of a London law firm. With my notice period complete, I was intrigued to see what would be waiting for me on the week-long going deeper meditation and hill-walking retreat at Dhanakosa.

The first answer was probably one that those of you familiar with Dhanakosa could have given me - breath-taking views and midges. A lot of midges. There followed the customary circle of chairs, complete with self-conscious descriptions of each person's previous experience of both meditation and puja, together with their hopes and aspirations for the week ahead.



For me, the most memorable part of this first meeting was one of my fellow retreatants thoughtfully reflecting on how different she anticipated it would feel to look around at the same circle of people in just seven days. At the time, I was anxiously noting that I was one of the least experienced meditators in a room of perceived meditation gurus. In a lesson prompted by this reflection, I now look back at this first meeting and realise how each person was inevitably confronting their own personal difficulties and concerns.

The retreat included a number of workshop sessions on particular aspects of the Dharma – including Buddhist ethics and the threefold path. The atmosphere during these sessions was incredibly open and warm - they were conducted in such a way that no question felt too small (or too big) to ask and everyone's contribution was considered with the same Buddhist sense of playful-seriousness that I am coming to appreciate so deeply. After detailed discussions of the precepts, we were encouraged to come up with our own personal precept - and as a result I am still seeking to control and limit the time I spend using my mobile phone, rather than allowing the use of my mobile phone to control and limit my time.

The week also introduced and explored different aspects of Buddhist practice and ways of preparing the mind and

body for meditation - namely mantra, puja (culminating in a spectacular Irish inspired puja by Loch Voil), an introduction to the bodhisattvas, poetry, and Qi Gong. To my surprise I came to learn that poetry had the ability to move me and began to look forward to the poem that would be read before each meditation session - particularly appreciating the introduction to the yogi and poet Danna Faulds.

The middle of the week included a silent period lasting for two full days. Although it was the aspect of the week I had been most concerned with before arriving, I found that I enjoyed the process of feeling wordlessly supported by and forming part of a group - particularly during those activities that so often involve conversation, such as eating and preparing food. I also felt that the silence created a spaciousness in my thinking and a sensitivity to my surroundings; and maintained the openness of the group, without conversation to prompt the unintentional creation of sub-groups.

So what about the meditation and the hill-walking? It must be a testament to the retreat experience that I have reached the word limit of this article without more than a brief mention of either. I can only recommend that those of you who have not been to Dhanakosa recently take any opportunity to go - to experience both retreat living, and the inspiration of spending time in a Buddhist community.

And to finish, one of the many inspiring poems from the week, *Walk Slowly* by Danna Foulds:

It only takes a reminder to breathe,
a moment to be still, and just like that,
something in me settles, softens, makes
space for imperfection. The harsh voice
of judgment drops to a whisper and I
remember again that life isn't a relay
race; that we will all cross the finish
line; that waking up to life is what we
were born for. As many times as I
forget, catch myself charging forward
without even knowing where I'm going,
that many times I can make the choice
to stop, to breathe, and be, and walk
slowly into the mystery.

Camilla was born in London, and is currently living there and working part-time.

