



notes from the directors's desk



Dhanakosa is a registered Scottish charity, with its principal charitable objective stated as "the advancement of the Buddhist religion". The constitution then goes on to say things like "to encourage members and others to live in accordance with the teachings of the Buddha". Of course, learning about Buddhism is

a relatively straightforward matter. You just get hold of a few books and read away. Living in accordance with the teachings of the Buddha is a little less straightforward. At a superficial level practicing ethics, meditating regularly and that sort of thing is still largely a matter of developing positive habits, challenging though that may sometimes be. But, to really live according to the teachings of the Buddha is to live the whole of our lives imbued with understanding, sensitivity, compassion and awareness. To be able to be friends with our weaknesses and failings, and those of others, whilst upholding as dear to us connection and kindness.

Buddhism as a teaching originated in Iron Age India and developed in the cultural context of central Asia and the east. Its religious expression is marked by these traditions. But Buddhism is pointing to truths about the nature of humanity beyond those traditions or their religious expressions. It is pointing to the inherently satisfying nature of connection, and the central importance of "non-greed" and "non-hatred", both at the level of the individual, and more broadly in society. And, it is pointing to a freedom of mind from which kindness flows. A significance that is as

important today with the problems of the modern world as it was back in the early Iron Age, when the Buddha walked the dusty roads of India. To live in accordance with the teaching of the Buddha is to live in accordance with a vision of humanity which is in its potential at least unerringly positive. And to do so in the midst of a world that is not always so positive.

People often come to Dhanakosa for a break, to recharge, to learn something new or to help get perspective on some experience or event in their lives. But, the invitation of retreats is to live. To become more and more fully alive, with depth and sensitivity.

By the time you are reading this the 2020 retreat programme will be open for bookings with our usual careful balance of introductory and regulars' retreats, with a variety of themes and opportunities for depth as well as exploration, both familiar programme elements and innovations. Running through it all is the desire for what is best in us humans, our fullest potential. Retreats are structured with a balance of teaching content and activities appropriate to their place in the programme, and designed to meet different needs and interest, but always to support that movement towards connection, depth and exploration that allows us to find our own deeply human potential.

What do you need? The space to find some clarity, an opportunity to reconnect, or to re-boot your meditation practice. A shared experience of diving into the Dharma to inspire your practice, or just a break... This year's programme has some great depth in it, but it also has a good variety of introductory retreats, so why not recommend an interested friend. Word of mouth recommendations continue to be the main reason why people come to Dhanakosa. And they are not disappointed.

retreat highlights 2020

- | | | |
|-----------------------|--|-------------------------------|
| 10 - 17 jul | wild swimming and embodied movement | introductory |
| | <i>led by Padmadarshini and Nayaka</i> | |
| 28 aug - 4 sep | everything matters | triratna regulars |
| | <i>led by Vajradarshini</i> | |
| 25 sep - 2 oct | awake in the wild | introductory |
| | <i>led by Nayaka and Siddhimala</i> | |
| 13 - 23 oct | absolute & relative: view & conduct | triratna order members |
| | <i>led by Viveka</i> | |
| 23 - 30 oct | 21st century bodhisattva | triratna regulars |
| | <i>led by Parami</i> | |



In this issue: Singhashri writes movingly about being fully present to ourselves, Kara shares her retreat experiences, we talk about how we are considering our ethical impact and community news. Enjoy and thank you for being part of Dhanakosa!

claiming our inheritance

A few years ago I was headed off to retreat. Reflecting on the intention I might set for myself as I entered into an intensive period of practice, I decided that I was sick of the part of me that thought she could conceptually understand and fully work out her experience. I wondered what it would be like if I didn't immediately assume I knew what I was experiencing, and in particular, what I was feeling. I decided that whatever feelings arose, I was simply going to feel them, without trying to work out what they were or why I was having them.

A few days into the retreat I began to touch into what I had previously labelled the dreaded demon doubt. It came as a heavy sinking feeling deep in the gut. It was accompanied by feelings I usually associate with fear and anxiety. I decided to withhold my labels and delve deeply into the physical sensations, as unbearable as I thought they might be. I stayed with it, stayed with it. I let myself fully and completely know this feeling, this deeply familiar set of sensations that I had for so long experienced as my "wrongness." These feelings, for as long as I could remember, had always had a message for me, and the message was, there is something wrong with me, deeply, deeply wrong with me.

But now, staying with the direct sensations and suspending any need to know, I began to sense into something that felt much more true. When I wasn't pushing the feeling away, or using it to shore up this deeply held view about myself, what I found was a deep sensitivity. And when I allowed myself to feel into that sensitivity, and the "fear" that habitually rose up in response to it, it began to change. What I discovered in that changing sensation was that there wasn't anything wrong with me. What I saw was that I had mistaken my deep sensitivity to suffering for a personal flaw. Finally I was able to step back and see that I was simply a being that experiences pain. And there is nothing wrong with that.

Touching into deep sensitivity, and the vulnerability of the human condition, began to open my heart to a tenderness so raw it felt like it might annihilate me. Suddenly, the hour upon hour of loving kindness practice I had slogged away at for years began to pay off. I could sit with my pain, and the recognition of the suffering of all beings, and meet it with acceptance, curiosity and a deep love. This was an inexplicable relief.



One thing that is clear to me is that the harm we cause, to ourselves and others, is all born of our deep sensitivity. To the deluded mind, this sensitivity is a threat to our system, because it is what receives our lives, with all its joy and pain, fully. Out of delusion, we react to the joy and pain with grasping or pulling away, making a self out of what we like and don't like. These preferences proliferate into all sorts of false views, when what we sense is related to as me and mine, or not me and not mine, when clung to or pushed away.

When we touch into our sensitivity, the practice is to stay with it, just as it is. Familiarise ourselves with it. As we do this, we will begin to see clearly the stories we've allowed ourselves to believe about it. We've believed those stories because, as untrue as they are, they are familiar and known to us. Yet our stories do not serve us in the pursuit of true emancipation from our suffering. When we are able to see clearly that our stories are just stories, we find our deepest inheritance, this raw sensitivity, and we learn to be with it. The practice is to allow that seeing clearly and being with to change us, deeply and totally.

Singhashri leads meditation retreats and courses across the UK, USA and mainland Europe. You can find more of her writings, recorded teachings, and teaching schedule on her website www.radicalembrace.org

In 2020 she will be teaching at Dhanakosa on the Hillwalking and Meditation retreat, 1-8 May.





ethics and the environment: our choices

Kindness and non-harm are at the heart of Buddhist ethical practice and for the team here with the complex task of running a busy retreat centre it's important to us to consider the choices we make and what values we communicate, to the many people who come here each year. Part of this is what food and other products we buy, and we want to share some of the recent changes we've made and plan to make.

From October 2019 we are going completely vegan in the retreat centre. We've always provided entirely vegan meals, with the addition of cow's milk, cheese (mainly for hillwalking retreat sandwiches) and honey. We've decided that we want to offer only vegan food because we want to model kindness and non-harm in relation to factory farming, cruelty in the dairy industry and in relationship to the planet too and reducing our carbon footprint.

We understand some people will miss the non-vegan extras, particularly perhaps cow's milk in tea. We encourage folk to try something different for the period of the retreat. Generally, people really enjoy our food and are sometimes surprised that a fully vegan diet can be so healthy and delicious. And our cooks are often the most popular person on the retreat! Lots of people buy a recipe book to take home and we are planning a second book to be published in the next 6 months, Lisa and Danabhadri are working at the moment to compile new recipes.

We will be providing organic soy milk and UK sourced oat milk. For coffee drinkers we recommend the oat milk which won't curdle in your drink. For hillwalking retreats we will be providing creative protein alternatives for sandwiches and snacks – like falafel, humous and other spreads, bean burger bites and energy balls made from nuts and dried fruit. Instead of honey we are offering a wider range of fruit jams.

We've been looking at other areas where we can make a choice that is less harmful. In our bathroom shop we only stock products that are cruelty-free. We also have new bamboo toothbrushes which are 100% biodegradable, with bamboo from sustainable sources and are panda friendly.

We recently changed our toilet roll supplier to a company that uses 100% recycled fibres for the paper, has no plastic wrapping and donates 50% of their profits to building toilets for those in need. If you're interested the company website is here: uk.whogivesacrap.org

We recognise with all these decisions that the food and supply chain web is very complex in the modern world and we have a limited budget too, but we try to make the best decisions we can and hope that our choices reduce harm where possible and encourage others to think about the effect of choices they make.

community news

We believe what we do here at Dhanakosa is truly radical - providing the conditions for over 1,000 people a year to meet the Dharma in the unique setting of this wild and beautiful landscape. All this is offered on the basis of dana - open-handed generosity - allowing people to pay what they can afford to come here on retreat.

We're looking for people to join us in offering this vision. We've two roles open to Order Members and GFR Mitras who would like to join our community to live, work and practice together. The recruitment is open until January 2020, for more information, see our website.

This summer and into autumn we're appreciating the help of longer term volunteers, coming to live with us for 3 months. Kevin, an artist and shamanic practitioner from Spain has been with us over the summer and Darren, who lived here before and whose friendly face will be familiar to many, will be coming to stay for autumn into winter. The extra pairs of hands are helping us out with building storage sheds and other practical work.

The link between the shrine room and the house is being much appreciated, it was used as a show space during the painting retreat this spring. The interior decoration is coming along slowly as we work around retreats. We've asked Sinhacandra, a Glasgow based stained glass artist to create two long panes for the main entrance which draw on the colours of the landscape and elements.



The community in May 2019, clockwise from far left: Ben, Amoghavira, Upekshanandi, Lisa, Leif, Dharmavasini, Nayaka, Abi and Chris.



painting pictures

Kara talks about her two visits to Dhanakosa this year, her first Photography retreat in April and taking part in our May work retreat.

I have always found photography fascinating but could never fathom how to work a camera. So many numbers, dials, settings, types of lenses, cameras. "When am ever going to find the time to do this?" I thought. I had wanted to return to Dhanakosa after really enjoying my first retreat 'Wild Awake' in January 2018. Upon checking the calendar I discovered the introduction to photography retreat. Perfect!

Driving up to Dhanakosa once again, I instantly felt that sense of slowing down. All the colours from the trees along the beautiful road seemed brighter, and the air clearer. There is that thought of "who will I meet this time", a mixture of nervousness and excitement. Sharing the first meal, you instantly make connections with the lovely people sharing your retreat. Being in the shrine room for the first meditation is like returning home; a place you can truly be you and let yourself go from the chaos of day-to-day life.

Every morning I got up early to see the sunrise, sometimes to take photographs, sometimes just to bathe in it. The morning photography workshops were great, led by Amoghavira, Viramati, Abi, and Chris. I was very excited to learn how to make moving water blurry by using slow shutter speed. Upon mastering this skill it's all I could think about doing. I often went up to the waterfall and would sit there for hours playing around. I particularly enjoyed doing this on the mindful workshop sessions, stopping in one place, sensing all around you, being with the space, noticing, immersing. You really do see things differently if you just show them a bit of attention.

Overall it was a wonderful retreat, full of great people who I felt a strong connection with, amazing food and vibes from our cook Carol, and some new skills too, both camera and life.

Not long after the photography retreat, I was back again! This time for the work retreat. I had heard about it previously and thought what a wonderful way to give back to such a very special place. Slightly more chaotic than the beginning of my other retreats, I arrived after working extremely hard on my final semester of my honors degree. As soon as I sat down to dinner, I was already in a calmer and better headspace and ready to take every day as it came.

As a newer retreatant, it was lovely to meet some regular folks who practiced Buddhism more often. My team mate

Campbell and I were the window frame painting and replacing dream team. He was a handy team mate to have, being a painter and decorator for many years. It was great to learn a few tricks of the trade! Not only was he my partner in crime, he became a great mentor of Buddhism and I loved to listen to his stories.



What impressed me the most about the week was seeing a different side to the community and all that they do. It is quite incredible. They work extremely hard and having been on other retreats, it is difficult to see just how hard they work. Being on this retreat gave me that insight and I am so grateful to them all and find it extremely inspiring. They are the cogs that keep the success of Dhanakosa going, touching so many peoples lives.



I will never forget Alex's cooking and I hope that all you readers have the pleasure of experiencing it at some point. His flavours are delicious, and I especially will never forget his tapenade, which was like fireworks for the taste buds. Also, his leftover custard – yummy in porridge, with a big dollop of jam!

Kara lives outside Inverness, the capital of the Highlands of Scotland, and has just completed an Honors degree in Marine and Coastal Tourism. She plans on working with coastal communities, helping them develop conservation and sustainable tourism.

