

# Active Hope for Humanity

## Dhanakosa Retreat

20-27 June 2025

Seeing the dangers confronting humankind these days, we can feel depressed, demoralised and helpless to avert disaster - or even to talk about such feelings. This retreat provides a space not only to talk but to explore an extraordinary sequence of reflections and communal practices that can rekindle an 'active hope' and vision for humanity.

The retreat takes its title from a book called Active Hope co-authored by Joanna Macy and Chris Johnston. See <http://www.activehope.info/> Having studied Buddhism, Joanna went on to develop this sequence of exercises and reflections to help us move from despair into an 'active hope'. Such hope is far more than something vague and passive ... more like a vision for humanity, a future to which we can contribute and actively help to bring about.

Joanna Macy calls her workshop sequence the 'Spiral of the Work That Reconnects'. Drawing on Buddhist ideas, living systems theory and deep ecology, the Work That Reconnects strengthens our capacity to give our best response to the global challenges confronting us. It involves a transformative journey through a spiral in four successive stages:-

(1) When we **come from gratitude** and appreciation we become more present to the life around us and the gifts we receive. This calms the mind and opens the heart in preparation for wise and compassionate responses to suffering. Then we can ...

(2) **honour our pain for the world**, by making space to hear our feelings in response to what is happening to our world. These may feel very raw, may at first seem 'negative' but they are all expressions of how much this matters to us, how much we care about what's happening. A profound caring and interconnectedness with life can start to arise as we let our real feelings emerge. We begin ...

(3) **seeing with new eyes**, with a deeper recognition of our mutual belonging on the living Earth. We come to understand the new kind of power this arouses and the many ways we can apply this to a life-sustaining society. We now get ready for

...

(4) **going forth** into the world with a fresh vision and practical steps.

### What can I expect from this retreat?

We'll begin each day with chi-kung by the loch then meditation in the shinerroom. Later in the morning we'll explore these special workshop exercises (see below for details). Then after lunch there'll be free time for walks, journaling, rest and an optional yoga class every afternoon. All this allows time to process and assimilate whatever gets stirred up. In the evenings we'll meet in small groups to share our experience and end the day with a short period of meditation. We'll have a silent period overnight (no conversation) though team members are available to talk things over should the need arise. No prior experience will be assumed and all necessary tuition will be provided.

### All retreats can be stirring and challenging at times but this more than most.

In order to transform the energies of fear, outrage, grief or despair we have to turn and face and feel them. This can release and free the blocked energies and channel them into creative and positive action. Yet the transition can sometimes be turbulent and uncomfortable. Are you up for that?

**What will I need on the retreat?** Please bring the customary waterproofs and walking boots as for any Dhanakosa retreat. A plentiful supply of handkerchiefs or tissues will come in handy for the tearful times. Please also bring a notebook and pen.

### **About the team**

Sukhema and Smritiratna are experienced ordained Buddhists who are skilled at integrating Joanna Macy's work with traditional meditation practices. Chandradhi and Amber Badyari are also qualified yoga teachers. Amayaraja trained at Ecodharma Retreat Centre and he completes our team. All team members participate fully in the workshop exercises.

### **Further Details**

This is what we did on the 2024 retreat to give you a sense of what to expect in 2025.

### **A Typical Daily Schedule**

7am Rising Bell, 7.30 Optional Chi-kung by Loch Voil, 8am Meditation inside,  
9.00 Breakfast  
10.30 First workshop exercise... break...  
11.45 Second workshop exercise  
1.00 Lunch then free time  
4pm Optional activities on offer, eg. yoga, chi-kung  
5.15 Meditation  
6.00 Dinner  
7.30 Meet altogether then in small groups... break...  
9.00 Meditation  
Silent period overnight

### **Examples of Workshop Exercises**

#### Grounding and Gratitude (Saturday, Sunday)

eg. Open Sentences on Gratitude (whatever is loved or appreciated)  
- pairwork (one just listening): a half-sentence to get started then a couple of minutes to talk freely. There are various half-sentences given, taking turns to speak.

#### Honouring Our Pain for the World (Monday)

eg. Open Sentences, honouring our pain (whatever concerns you these days)  
- pairwork as above

eg. Truth Mandala - a sacred, held space

We sit together in a big circle. In the centre are symbols of anger, grief, despair and fear. The leader explains the symbols (the stick, the dead leaves, the empty bowl, the stone) and lays out ground rules such as confidentiality. Then we sit to bear silent witness as one by one, anyone is free to step into the centre if they wish to express their true feelings - to be heard and witnessed.... 'We hear you!' ...

#### Seeing With New Eyes (Tuesday, Wednesday)

eg. 'Active Hope and the Three Stories of Our Time'  
Considering active hope not as a mood but as a choice we make...

eg. Letter from the Future

After imagining a future you'd like to see, this free writing exercise is to compile a letter as if from someone living at that future time, a letter to you their ancestor - perhaps expressing appreciation and encouragement, as well as describing their life in (say) 2224, about seven generations from now.

### Going Forth - considering new ways forward (Thursday)

eg. Consultation Groups

After compiling your short-term goals (days) and long term goals (coming year) and considering the hurdles to be overcome (internal and external), we meet in consultation groups of four, to present our goals, consult the others and receive their encouragement.

### **Reviews of the 2024 retreat - average ratings out of five**

Communications before the retreat?	4.8
How well it was led overall?	4.9
Meditation teaching?	4.9
Standard of accommodation?	4.8
Well supported by retreat organiser?	5.0
Quality of the food?	5.0

### **Testimonials from the 2024 Retreat**

*"I've discovered that community is essential to what lies ahead. I hadn't really realised how embedded the community was in this week and I had thought of it as more of a personal endeavour but now I see the importance of being witnessed and acting together. I so appreciated the filter coffee - thank-you. The only small thing I would change is the pillows as they were quite lumpy. Thank-you for holding this space so beautifully."*

*"[I discovered] the importance of human connection to help me deal with feelings of despair about the environmental crisis and planetary grief. I didn't expect it to be this powerful. I think the rituals and workshops led by our teachers enabled these human connections to go deeper than I thought possible in the space of one week. Poignant, joyful, insightful."*

*"[I discovered] that the power of the human heart is immense. Collectively it can do anything and I've rediscovered this. Thank-you all for your kindness and love, your authentic selves and the space that has allowed me to safely navigate challenging territory of the heart."*

*"What a beautiful place this is... I want to come back and will be spreading the word. Amazing group and wonderful facilitating... helped consolidate my role/work ... reconnect to my meditation practice. It was a lot more stimulating than other retreats... a lot more talking and connecting, but this was helpful for the context."*

*"Transformational! What a powerful journey of work. I have renewed connection to the Buddhist meditation practices and connection with my love for the world and a strong urge to action. It was far more profound, so much more so than I could have expected."*

*"I loved all the activities and got something out of every exercise. I like that there were several formats - writing, pairs, small groups and whole group."*

*"It was emotionally difficult at times but I think this was a necessary part of the process and this has provided me with tools to deal with any upcoming feelings of despair or anger."*

*“Wonderfully structured and inspiring and insightful - I loved this week. Thank-you!”*

*“It worked totally amazing for me and I feel deeply grateful for all the teachings and practices you guide me through.”*