



# DhanakosaNews

## Seven Years in Balquhiddar



AROUND THE TURN of the year I am leaving Dhanakosa after nearly seven years. I came here in April 2000. I was starting out on my training for ordination and didn't feel that my situation in Edinburgh was particularly supportive of this. I did contemplate moving to Birmingham, but thankfully Nayaka managed to persuade the trustees to take me on as a fundraiser.

Fundraiser – hmmm, this was a very difficult job. It lasted about two and a half years, followed by a few months in maintenance before I took over from Nayaka as the team manager. It seems I have contributed in some way or other to all the many facets of Dhanakosa – from the sewage works to the council meetings I've seen it all!

There have been too many fantastic moments to list them all but some highlights do stand out: Helping in the process of Dhanakosa becoming an independent charity was very satisfying. Finally being able to buy Dhanakosa after years of fundraising (and knowing that the fundraising was over) was definitely a high point. The best bit about the fundraising was writing trust fund applications, booklets and letters, and of course reading letters from the many generous donors. Through this I got a real sense of how highly people value Dhanakosa and the place of importance it occupies in many peoples lives.

In the last year or two I have, on occasion, caught myself walking around the centre feeling quite proud. Driving up standards of cleanliness and aesthetics has been a bit of a mission since I got here really and I feel happy that we have come a long way. Working on retreats has been a privilege. I have witnessed many times the transformation that happens in a week; From a bunch of strangers a little anxious at the beginning to friends who leave feeling inspired and more deeply connected with what it means to be alive. And, of course, there is the garden. I truly have loved being able to work the land here. Planting trees is amazing anywhere but particularly so here in this beautiful glen.

The community here has changed beyond recognition since I arrived. Despite difficulties through the years, I have grown tremendously and received lots of encouragement. Friendships have developed where they wouldn't have otherwise. There have been many happy times, many laughs, many times where I have felt connected; brothers in the Dharma life, all striving, all with the same purpose. This is probably what I will miss the most.

Now it's time to move on. It's time to leave the cloisters. To do what? Well, I am setting up a garden design business called 'Plantforms' ([info@plantforms.co.uk](mailto:info@plantforms.co.uk)), initially specializing in designing planting schemes. I'm greatly looking forward to this move into a more creative livelihood and the challenges that it will bring. I will, however, still be involved in Dhanakosa through being a trustee of the charity and no doubt occasionally working in the grounds and on the odd retreat. Perhaps I'll see you around.

Much love, thanks and best wishes

– Dhiraka

### He's Done It!

Yes, at the beginning of October Amoghavira completed his sponsored run up Ben Vorlich, Scotland's 165th highest mountain at 3232ft. His time was 68mins & 56secs, not bad for someone of his advancing years! Which means Wendy Perkins from Nottingham, who guessed 69mins, came closest and has won herself a free retreat at Dhanakosa. Congratulations Wendy and well done Amoghavira for raising £1119.50 for Dhanakosa.



## Taming the Monsters

AS A CITY GIRL who always thought herself rather oblivious to the beauty of nature, I was surprised to find myself steadily calling to mind the images of Loch Voil and of the hills surrounding Balquidder for over a year and a half, following a first experience on a yoga and meditation retreat with Smritiratna and team. It was time to go back. And so I embarked for new adventures in hillwalking and meditation with Amoghavira and Tarasiddhi.



It was time to return to Dhanakosa, it was time for an insight: once again I needed to decide where to live, what to do with this existence of mine. What felt like the vertigo of infinite possibility lay before me. The insight came to me in a trail of incense at the shrine. *Whatever I do, wherever I go, my brothers and my sisters will*

*show up on time. Lovers, companions, friends, spiritual guides, mentors, children...* if I am true to myself and continue to strive to take full responsibility for my life, they will all appear before me, in perfect time. I am not going to “miss the train” of my life – I am already in it.

It is so hard to put in words what happens on a retreat, how could I ever write a “review” as was suggested to me? I would have to take you on the shoulder of an eagle through the tormented Scottish skies, I would have to plunge you into the glistening stillness of the Loch at dawn, I would have to give you the grass between your toes as you rest your tired feet in the gardens by the waterfall, I would have to envelop you with the gracious unfolding companionship of silent strangers sharing a meal.

I cannot possibly describe what happens at Dhanakosa, but I can tell you what it means to me. I am able to live the way I live, to roam far and wide in both inner and outer worlds, accepting the vainness of any form of quest for a home, fully embracing this “homelessness” and confused identity, only because I can run again and again to magical places like Dhanakosa. This is not a running away. Rather, I sit and sit and I sit some more in the company of the very demons that are so easy to ignore in the daily grind. A loving cohabitation with monsters who require a special kind of taming where no whips are cracked: meditation. It has taken years to turn one of them, that deep-seated loneliness, into a celebration of the freedom that up-rooted-ness has to offer. Dhanakosa and the people who make it happen have been pivotal in this process. For this I am eternally grateful.

–Savanna Luraschi

## The Art of Being

IN THE GROUNDS of Dhanakosa there’s an installation: a site-specific artwork. You may need to spend a little time – and do a bit of work – to see it, but the resolute and observant hunter may be rewarded! I hope that both the search and the discovery may provide some enjoyment. Having trained as an artist and exhibited work mainly in London and abroad, I’ve been looking for ways of integrating this with my spiritual practice.

Spending time at Dhanakosa in July provided a precious opportunity to develop a new relationship with my work in the most beneficial of conditions. Following a week’s Pure Awareness meditation retreat, I was in a positive frame of mind and without the burden of expectations ... other than those which, from time to time, I generated for myself!

My intention was to keep things simple, to concentrate on *process* rather than product – on being, rather than doing. In an environment dedicated to supporting spiritual practice, it was possible to observe my own activity with an objectivity and freedom that I’ve not found elsewhere. I felt able to unhook myself from unhelpful ways of working that, in the past, have resulted in a driven, anxious, and often very destructive, alliance with my art practice.



The resident community were generous and accommodating – getting on with their own lives, their work of running and maintaining the retreat centre, whilst allowing me to feel relaxed and unpressured. Especially valuable was maintaining a momentum from the preceding week’s retreat – meditating with members of the community, or on my own, whenever I felt inclined to sit in a shrine room or take advantage of Loch Voil’s exquisite surroundings.

House martins twittering in preparation for their southward journey; food created with *metta*; vivid luminosity of foliage in sunlight; patience and sensitivity; a horsefly’s sharp puncture; cadences of laughter from the office; skin spangled with water droplets after a swim; kindness and acceptance; chanting from an upstairs window. The wonderful particularities; the amazing ordinariness of it all.

Engaging with my experience for what it was: pleasant, unpleasant...and, above all, transient – was an essential aspect of the time I spent at Dhanakosa this summer, and of the work I made whilst I was there.

–Jo Bennett

# Next Year's Retreat Programme

LOOKING THROUGH our 2007 programme the first thing that strikes me is the diversity of retreats we have on offer; another veritable smorgasbord of old favourites and new delicacies.

Just to pick out a few retreats to whet your appetite. At the end of January we have the Wisdom of the Body – a Focusing and Meditation retreat led by the personable Manjudeva, a qualified focusing teacher. Talking about the retreat Manjudeva says “focusing is a gentle practice of listening to the wisdom and intelligence held within our bodies. One of the key themes in focusing is acceptance. By learning to deeply accept our experience, whatever it is, we can begin to tread a path towards wholeness and transformation. Combining this with meditation and ritual we will explore the body, not just as a foundation for practice but as a source of inspiration and teaching.”



In February we have the ebullient Siddhisambhava taking us on a journey into the Buddhist understanding of life and death in the intriguingly titled “Death and the only Beauty that Lasts”

In April we reintroduce a retreat missing from our programme for a few years: the painting and meditation retreat. Led by Lesley Burr, the talented landscape painter.

In June we will be having a summer solstice retreat with those masters of celebration Ratnadevi and Larry Butler – should be fun.

In July we welcome back Paramananda, author of the Dhanakosa bookshop best seller, ‘Change Your Mind’, for a meditation retreat. Outlining his approach Paramananda says ‘The longer I teach the more I feel that meditation is a natural and very simple practice. Meditation offers us the opportunity to develop a sense of intimacy and care towards ourselves, as we are in each moment. The retreat will focus on cultivating a sense of confidence and a spirit of exploration in our practice.’

September sees the return of the ‘Total Immersion’ meditation retreat. Led by Vessantara, this will feature two weeks of silence and meditation – a chance to take a deep dive into your experience, to savour it and explore its true nature – sounds great!

In October we have Parami returning with her Inner Peace, Outer Peace retreat. Inspired by her care for the environment and her deep commitment to creating the conditions for peace in the world, Parami brings all her considerable skills to creating a memorable retreat experience.

We had some great feedback from this years’ Dance and Meditation retreat so next December we have invited back the effervescent Jocasta Crofts for some more ‘meditation in motion’.

So, a tasty platter to suit all tastes for next year. See you then.

–Amoghavira

## Dhanakosa Retreat Calendar

Balquhiddy, Lochearnhead, FK19 8PQ 01877 384 213 info@dhanakosa.com www.dhanakosa.com

### 06/ 07

#### Nov

Wisdom Energy of the Five Dakinis  
NVC Foundation Training

17-24 (fwbo regulars)

27-30 (fwbo regulars)

#### Dec

From Dark to Light (Winter Solstice retreat)  
Men's Winter Retreat

15-22 (intro)

22-29 (fwbo regulars)

#### Jan

Indian Head Massage & Meditation  
Introduction to Meditation  
Focusing & Meditation

05-07 (intro)

19-21 (intro)

26-02 (intro)

#### Feb

Death & the Only Beauty That Lasts

09-16 (fwbo regulars)

# News from the Garden

WHAT A GLORIOUS summer we have had this year. Dhanakosa really does look its best when the sun is shining. The garden has also been great this year. Although I didn't have much time



to invest in it I got some annuals sown in the cutting garden, a few new perennials in the herbaceous border and nurtured the new planting in the patio bed. This circular bed in the patio, full of bamboo, wild roses, and Japanese maples was a bit bruised by early spring winds and over zealous footballers. It is recovering nicely and already the bamboo has sprouted healthy new shoots.

Highlights from the cutting garden this year were the peonies. Double pink and highly scented on the shrine during the June

## Dhanakosa Maintenance

THIS MAY Dhanakosa again closed its doors to the world so that three big maintenance projects could be carried out. Like last year, re-slatting part of the roof was a main job and the weather was again favourable for the Doune-based roofing company to lay shiny new slates on the the east side of the centre's roof. They did a fine job. So guests can now sleep safely knowing they are well protected from the elements for another 150 years or so.

Less visible work was done inside the building. On the plumbing; replacing old worn out pipes with new copper piping, and with the electrics; re-wiring the front of the house. These major tasks were carried out by professional contractors.

In the kitchen we had a brand new commercial extractor fan fitted above the cooker to help reduce heat and cooking fumes.

hillwalking retreat - looked so good! Autumn sown sweet peas did really well and perfumed the centre all summer. A 'happy accident' happened by sticking in a few excess marigolds around the base of the sweet pea tee-pee. I had forgotten that there were lily bulbs at that spot - purple ones! What a great combination, the tall vertical stems of the lilies with their long trumpet-like flowers contrasting with the flat daisy heads of the marigolds! Into the late summer were lovely lemon yellow sunflowers, pinched out so they branch and produce several flowers, and burgundy Dahlia's mixed around with tall plum gladioli.

And the trees - the trees. As I mentioned in the spring newsletter they are really starting to show themselves. What a great growing season it has been for them this year. The whole place has been filled with a sense of abundance and growth.

-Dhiraka

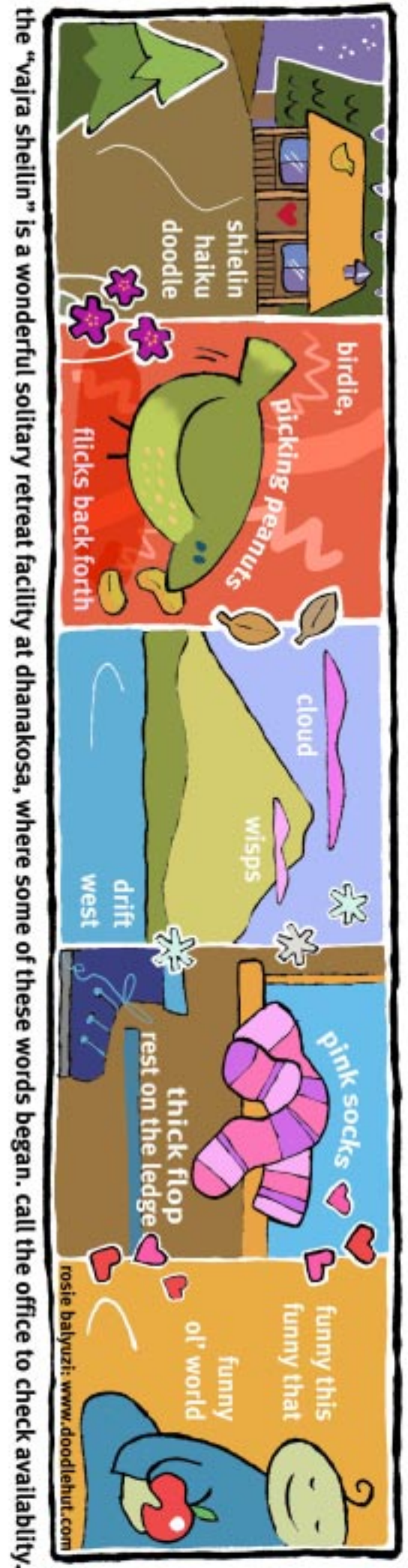


Our favourite Buddhist tradesmen were brought in to build a new improved food store and also a tea-bar for the dining room. Gunapala, fresh from finishing the sparkly new Edinburgh Buddhist Centre and joiner Andy Newlands, who battled against a nasty dose of sinusitis while being here, (and still did a lovely job).

We also had help from various friends & volunteers who came and applied the finishing touches to bathrooms, bedrooms, doorways and walls.

A big thank you to those who came and gave their time and energy to Dhanakosa.

-Neil



the "vajra sheilin" is a wonderful solitary retreat facility at dhanakosa, where some of these words began. call the office to check availability.