

DhanakosaNews

Moving to Dhanakosa



After 21 years of living in the north (of Scotland) and 18 months of detailed talks and preparations I made the move to Strathyre, 6 miles from Dhanakosa with my partner Nayaka and our two children Rosie (now 2 ½) and Ben (1). That was last September and it was the first step of our intention to move to Dhanakosa itself, the idea being that Nayaka would take on the job of centre

director and we would build a house in the grounds as a home for us all, as a Buddhist family, living and working as part of the extended Dhanakosa project. As the kids get older and I have more time I will also be able to work as part of the team. I used to live and work with others as part of a childrens theatre company called the Clown Jewels when my eldest son Louie (now 19) was little so I do have some experience of living as a family but at the same time working and managing a bigger project. The exciting thing about this move is that it is an opportunity to do this in a more explicitly Buddhist context (and without the red noses – at least most of the time!). I definitely see moving to Dhanakosa as a serious commitment to practice, and as part of a bigger vision of Dhanakosa which embraces a diversity of lifestyles including living as a family.

I have many good friends in the Highlands and it has been quite hard leaving them behind. Unfortunately Louie also has a serious illness which recurred just as he was starting university last autumn. It's not been easy trying to cope with that, and the demands of small



children, on top of the move. On the other hand we have been warmly welcomed here. The community have been very friendly and I have appreciated being closer to friends in Glasgow. And look forward to being able to make new friends in the Sangha down here. The local community have also been friendly and welcoming, and we are starting to settle in and find our feet.

Six months on, the planning permission for the house has finally come through. It has, for the time being, stopped

raining and we are looking forward to the summer. We hope to move to Dhanakosa later in the year and hope to have the house completed by next spring. So, if you are coming to Dhanakosa in the second half of the year, you may well see us around.

Dharmavasini

100,000 Prostrations!

"In the midst of a clear blue sky appears the refuge tree. An enormous tree of lotus flowers on which sit many great Dharma teachers both past and present; the Buddhas, the Bodhisattvas and all the Dharma texts. In short everything of spiritual value in this universe. In response to this vision I bow my head. In fact I bow my whole body by ritually prostrating myself on the ground."

This is something of the flavour of the Going for Refuge and Prostration practice, a meditation and devotional practice that comes down to us from the Tibetan tradition. As with many of these Tibetan practices we are encouraged to do a lot of it, the tradition says we should do 100,000. This might sound rather strange (or bonkers!) but there is real wisdom in making a commitment to do so much of something, it means you've got to do it even when you don't feel like it and this is what Jamie has decided to do.



In keeping with the spirit of the practice, he wants it to benefit others and is inviting donations to go to Dhanakosa to express his gratitude for all that he has received over the years. I am very moved by Jamie's endeavour as I often am by his incredible courage and perseverance with his practice.

Jamie reckons it will take about 3 years. We can keep up with his progress by looking at the notice board in the retreat centre. So I really encourage you to express your gratitude as well, financially! Please send payments to Dhanakosa marked '100,000 Prostrations'.

Sadhu Jamie!

With much metta
Bodhidaka

Chop it up!

Cooking has been a lifelong fascination for me. My first experience of cooking was at primary school where we toasted our lunchtime pieces (sandwiches) by impaling them on a ruler and holding them in front of the open fire that heated our schoolroom. It took a fine sense of judgement to get the piece satisfactorily toasted before the ruler went on fire!

A lifetime of twists and turns finally brought me to the kitchen at Dhanakosa in 1997. In those days retreats cooked for themselves. It was all a bit haphazard as few of us had a clue about cooking large quantities, but never mind, I made lots of good pals in the kitchen. Really cooking at Dhanakosa is all about making friends; – with the retreat as a whole, with the people in the kitchen on the day and with the equipment. I had a very uncomfortable relationship with the oven at Dhanakosa until I had a little “insight” into how it worked. I have also had to learn to communicate clearly; – “chop it up into small pieces” can be interpreted in an amazing number of ways.

At first I was totally focussed on getting food on the counter. My repertoire was six recipes. Things didn't always turn out the way I expected but thankfully they always turned out edible. Time passed and confidence grew, I added recipes to Vajrahridaya's collection. We began to share ideas about food and are presently working on a recipe book. I enjoy being inventive with recipes. I find a new recipe, adapt it for Dhanakosa, and try it out on my husband. If it passes the “Iain test” it goes to Dhanakosa, if not it is back to the drawing board.

As I began to get the hang of cooking I started to consider how food could best support a retreat. Initially I thought that food should slip unobtrusively under a retreat, it should not be boring nor should it be too exciting. This didn't work. Eventually I understood what Suriyavamsa described as the two poles of energy of a retreat; –the shrine room and the kitchen. Now I try to get a feel for the energy of a retreat and fit the choice of food and the arrangements for preparing it in with the energy. Some retreats, especially meditation retreats, have a smooth solid feel about them so I try to have everything to hand so that the food prep goes smoothly and doesn't jar the retreatants. Others are quite joyful and a bit unruly, much harder to contain in the kitchen but it is fun to try.



Last year I felt that cooking was like a puja; –it was an offering to the three jewels. My activities in the kitchen began to develop a devotional energy of their own, initially quite undirected, but when Vajrahridaya shared his vision of the kitchen as a place of transformation with me I began to understand the potential of cooking as a spiritual practice.

At present I am searching for new and delicious recipes and studying Dogen's “Instructions for the Zen Cook” so that the catering and I will both grow and develop.

Margaret Fergusson

Wherever you go, there you are

In Dec. 06 I joined the Glasgow Sangha on the grand pilgrimage to India. Steering through the mysterious dense fog around Heathrow Airport we reached Delhi and were greeted by Ratnaketu and his team. I rejoice in their hard work and kindness, providing us with the best Indian comfort and food. The night journey from Delhi to Lucknow was our first introduction to the Indian Railways. After receiving a proper Indian style welcome in Lucknow, we were ready for an adventurous coach journey extending hundreds of miles across northern India.



We started with Sravasti, where Buddha spend his last twenty-four rainy seasons giving many of his important teachings. We offered puja in Jeta's Grove, sitting in the remains of the perfumed Buddha's hut (Gandh-kuti). The intense sun was melting my heart gently so that all gratitude could flow freely and easily. It was here Angulimala, a murderer, transformed his heart on encountering the Buddha. Witnessing the ruin that was once a powerful kingdom, now lying deeply buried, reminded me to be humble.



Crossing the dusty Indian borders, we arrived in Lumbini, Nepal where howling foxes welcomed us into the deep, frightening and quiet night only to be woken up by mantras and bells ringing loud enough to wake me up to reality, but I lazily covered my head under the blanket. One misty morning we walked mindfully in a long row to the site where the Buddha was born. It was amazing...! We also visited magnificently decorated monasteries covered in magical mist and wonder.

Gazing through the windows with eyes wide open (and occasionally stopping for pee rituals by the side of the crowded roads) we arrived at Kushinara, where Buddha attained mahaparinirvana, his death. Sitting in a circle around the huge lying down Golden Buddha, after long Circumambulations and listening to the chants, I was reminded of Buddha's last words, “With Mindfulness strive on”. *continued on next page.*

Finally, we managed to strive towards Bodhgaya, the heart of our pilgrimage, the place where Buddha attained enlightenment. We were fortunate to arrive at Vajrasanna, the diamond throne under the Bodhi tree, during the full moon day. We spent four days there. It was a spectacular sight: Buddhists from all over gather there to pay their respects and gratitude. If anyone wants to witness the richness of Buddhism, this is the place to visit. It's vibrant, alive and full of energy. One morning we even received the blessings of Karmapa Lama, had Mitra ceremonies under the Bodhi tree and visited FWBO/TBMSG land planting a tree to mark our visit to this holy site.

It was two weeks now, travelling across northern India mainly by coach on bumpy Indian roads. Most of us were feeling the heat, intensity and tiredness of the journey. It was a real experience, a phenomenon and a strong cultural shock for some who were there for the first time. We were touched by everything we came across: the richness, the poverty, humbleness, strengths, openness, unexpected surprises and lovely people. Everything was out there to meet you straight into your eyes in all its manifestations.

After two weeks travel with the Glasgow Sangha I left for Poona, west central India, to meet my family after four years and spend my last two weeks of pilgrimage with them. I would like to thank Gail Mackenzie, Tarasiddhi and the Glasgow Sangha for their generous support and the opportunity they offered to see my homeland with new eyes.

Vajrahridaya

Photography & Meditation Retreat Oct 06

Photography and meditation are two passions of mine. I've been a practising Buddhist for a number of years and before moving to Devon to work with Buddhafield, I studied and worked in photography. Since then I've explored ways to integrate photography and my spiritual practice in the hope and belief that they can compliment and support one another.

I remember reading the publicity for Dhanakosa's meditation and photography retreat in 2005 and feeling this huge welling of excitement and joy that such a



thing existed- AND that it existed in the gorgeous surroundings of Loch Voil. I've since been on two such retreats, the second as a member of the teaching team.

Amoghavira and Steve knight have very successfully been running the retreat for at least seven years and I thought I'd find it tough to 'infiltrate' their double act but they gave me the opportunity to share my particular approach with retreatants, coming from an art based, 'Zen' angle.

I'm driven by a desire to trust the process of meditation, to allow it to lead into photography, encouraging deep seeing and being with the subject, be it a person, landscape or tiny toadstool. I want to move away from snatching and grabbing an image, instead attempting to feel a sense of the subject's 'Is-ness', to use a Zen term. Ultimately to see Reality in the process. It's a tall order but I believe it's possible!

The retreats have brought me a lot of joy. This year particularly, I found myself laughing much of the time. I enjoyed the sharing of images during slide shows and witnessing individual's ideas and progressions as the week passed. I also loved the solitary expeditions to find settings and subject matter.

One of the most striking parts of the retreat was Amoghavira's decision not to put the clocks back with the rest of the UK. This gave us more light to photograph in the afternoons and meant we wouldn't have to get up quite so early for our photographic dawn raid on Glen Coe! On our trip to Glen Coe and Rannoch Moor, I was acutely aware that we were inhabiting an 'alternate time zone' from the other photographers seen lurking in bushes and waiting by the loch for Dawn's rosy glow. It helped me retain a sense of being on retreat as we ventured 'out in the world'.

I feel extremely grateful to have discovered this retreat held in the beauty and heart of Dhanakosa. It's become a highlight of my year and provides a great opportunity to explore the path of meditation and creativity.

Hannah Phillips



a 'Rumi' polaroid transfer

Balanced effort

It is now five and a half years since we bought Dhanakosa and almost fifteen years since we started running retreats here. A lot has changed over that time. The first steps in our strategic plan immediately following purchase were to try and maintain a stable and effective team, strengthen the retreat program (both economically and spiritually) and get to grips with some of the bigger maintenance issues affecting the property. Over the last eighteen months we have had to think quite innovatively about how we maintain the necessary management of the project and Dhanakosa is now set to become the first FWBO retreat centre to take on a family. When I moved out of the community here three and a half years ago I expected that by now I would have relatively low input into the project. I did not expect to be coming back as centre director, accompanied by Dharmavasini and our two children.



Dhanakosa is not the same place I left in 2003. It has different needs now. My job is to evaluate those needs on an ongoing basis and try to direct our efforts and energies so the project continues to evolve in line with our overall

vision, and in the context of the world around us. When I think about that I realise what a huge and multifaceted task it is. But it is also a task rooted in the practical reality of the resources available to us. It's not just a job, it's a spiritual practice. One of the issues I would like to tackle over the next period is retreat accommodation. We have long felt that having six beds in room nine is unsatisfactory and almost every week we are struggling to meet the requests we get for single rooms. We are also aware of a number of issues where the existing lay out of the buildings does not serve us

particularly well; a quiet room that is also part of the access to half the bedrooms for example and the lack of both a suitable entrance/ lobby facility and wet weather access to the shrine room. Then of course there is the problem of providing suitable disabled access.

All these developments present problems for us. Loss of beds is loss of income, weeks closed is loss of income. Somehow this must be made up. We have to strike the balance between improvements and affordability of the centre. Developments also have to be done carefully and sensitively to make sure they enhance rather than detract from the ambiance of the centre. I still hope we can reduce the number of beds in room nine and add an en-suite bathroom quite soon. Once this is done the way is open to provide access to the front of the house which bypasses the quiet room.

If you would like to comment on planned developments, or make your own suggestions, please e-mail me at nayaka@dhanakosa.org

Nayaka



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Retreat Calendar

June-November 2007

Summer Solstice Retreat (introductory)	15-22 June
The Embodied Mind (regular meditators) led by Paramananda	06-13 July
Summer Open (introductory)	10-17 Aug
Hillwalking & Meditation (introductory)	24-31 Aug
Gay Mens Retreat (introductory)	07-14 Sept
Yoga, Reflexology, Aromatherapy & Meditation (introductory)	05-12 Oct
Photography & Meditation, using a Digital or Film SLR camera (introductory)	02-09 Nov

To book a retreat send a £50 deposit (payable to Dhanakosa) to: Dhanakosa, Balquhider, Lochearnhead, FK19 8PQ. Alternatively you can use a credit or debit card over the phone. Tel: **01877 384 213**.