

# DHANAKOSA News

Autumn/ Winter 07

In this issue: Interview with Parami, Amoghavira finds solitude, Mike & Bambi take up residency, Retreat reflections, Nature notes & more

## Healing Self, Healing World



*Parami is a leading member of the Western Buddhist Order who runs workshops and retreats at Dhanakosa and other places around the world. Her work is influenced by that of Joanna Macy. We asked her about this work.*

### **DK: When and how did you first become interested in Joanna Macy's work?**

Parami: In the early 1980s I read articles by Joanna dealing with what she called Despair and Personal Power in the Nuclear Age. She later published a book with the same name which I found very moving. I think it was in 1982 or 83 that she came to London and I went to hear her speak at St James' church, Piccadilly in London. I was knocked out by the combination of dharma and social awareness and a call to social action.

In 2000 someone gave me her autobiography as a birthday present and that rekindled my interest in meeting Joanna and working with her. Since then I have done quite a few workshops with her including a two week intensive workshop in California. The workshops are called "The Work that Reconnects" and have had a strong influence on my own teaching. The reconnection is with ourselves, our feelings and our responses to the world.

### **DK: What particularly about her work interests you?**

Parami: I find the approach of acknowledging our response to the suffering we see around us in the world and then using the energy unlocked by that acknowledgment very empowering. We often block out our fear, our anger and our despair because we fear that we will be unable to function if we open up to the suffering of the world. My own deeply held belief and experience is that the contrary is true. I found this over the many years I worked with people facing their own death or the death of a loved one.

We found that really contacting, admitting and sharing our feelings, fears and learnings with others released energy and then we could learn to live more fully and more passionately. In the same way, I think Joanna's work helps people to release feelings that they have found difficult. It has also helped me go more deeply into the seeming contradiction between spiritual practice and acting in the world.

### **DK: Could you say a little bit about what sort of things you do on these retreats, and maybe talk about how this helps people?**

Parami: A lot depends on who attends the retreat and what topics are "live" for them in the moment. There is a structure that we follow but the team will be fairly flexible in exactly what that means. We explore the issues that we feel in conflict about and find ways of nurturing inner peace. People say that they contact a depth of care and motivation that they had long ago lost. The strength of the connections felt between people doing this work together has also been truly inspiring. I have been told that participating in these workshops has allowed people to see how their Buddhism can help them be effective in the world and how engaging with the world helps deepen their practice of Dharma in quite unexpected ways.

### **DK: In what ways do you feel that Dharma practice can really make a positive impact on the world?**

Parami: Many of the problems facing the world today -- poverty, environmental issues, global conflict -- stem, in my opinion, from the poisons that Buddhism has always named. They are manifestations of greed, hatred and



ignorance on a scale that has never been seen before. More than ever before it is urgent that we learn that our actions have consequences, and that the values of care, solidarity and the simplicity found, for example, in Buddhist ethics can offer ways of living in the complexity of the 21st century. Meditation practice also can help us to develop clarity and compassion, to not look away from the suffering of the world without becoming completely overwhelmed.

*The full version of this interview can be read on [parami2u.blogspot.com](http://parami2u.blogspot.com) under September blog archive.*

## An Embodied Experience

Driving off the motorway, onto a B road and then a dirt track is a sloughing away of the everyday. And then you arrive at an oasis, Dhanakosa in its beautiful setting....loch, hill, trees and sky.



I always look forward to retreats and the Embodied Mind with Paramananda was wonderful.

I was in good company with 28 participants. My friends are always appalled when I say I will be sharing a room with 3 other women whom I have never met before. In fact I have always found that people who come to these things are so considerate and there is such a respect for privacy that it is never a problem.

The meals at Dhanakosa retreats are renowned. Both Margaret Fergusson and Vajrahridaya prepared delicious vegetarian food. I helped in the preparation and learned lots including how to pronounce Quinoa.....keen waar.

The retreat was advertised (is that the right word?) as "The Embodied Mind", promising meditation and simple bodywork to awaken the imagination. Paramananda, who has written three very engaging books, was a calm and thoughtful leader. He inspired us with his recitations of poetry and reassured us that there was no such thing as a "bad" meditation. We chanted and did sitting and walking meditation. Mahabodi shared in leading the meditations and the very energising chi chung.

The most challenging part for me was the three days of silence! I had always wanted to experience this but found it difficult to curb my desire to get to know my new-found friends. To be fair some of them also wanted to chat. I did realise at the end that those who had observed the silence had gained something that I had not. On another occasion I feel I will be more respectful about silence.

On the last night we had a beautiful walk to the garden, chanting and holding candles, to where Dylis had made a mandala out of flowers. It was a truly lovely ceremony to celebrate the end of a week of tranquillity and growing self awareness. Thank you Dhanakosa.

**Michiko Clark**

## Discovering Tranquillity

When we started attending the Newcastle Buddhist Centre twelve years ago one of our first friends was a young man called Dunstan. A short while later he told us he was moving to Dhanakosa for a trial few weeks. On his return we were sorry to learn he had decided to move there, so ten years ago we thought we had better see for ourselves what was the attraction. It soon became apparent that, like him, we had discovered a magical place of peace and tranquillity where he was obviously in his element.

A small group of people had the vision to see the potential for a retreat centre here and have worked extremely hard to make Dhanakosa the success it is today. From those early days when there were only nine of us on a Hillwalking retreat and we did our own cooking - which led to some interesting meals - there have been many improvements including (thank goodness) a cook.

We have always received a warm welcome, kindness, understanding and encouragement in furthering our practice and meditation. Although our hillwalking days are over we still find much to enjoy in the surroundings. Particular memories are watching the birds, seeing deer in the meadow, a squirrel near the front lawn, leaving the shrine room at night to see a full moon casting a silver pathway across the loch (and we have the photograph to remind us). Visiting at different times of the year we have enjoyed the changing seasons.

We particularly enjoyed days of silence, the shrine room filled with energy from the chanting of the Avalokitesvara mantra, 'chopping it up' with metta in the kitchen and encircling a bonfire one night at the lochside. As time has gone by our two daughters and two of our granddaughters have also enjoyed the Dhanakosa experience. The magic has cast its spell on us all from eight years old to eighty. We have met interesting people and made several new friends.



What of our early friend Dunstan? He soon became Nayaka, of course, and after a few years away he returned as director. We hope to continue our annual visits and eventually our ashes will be scattered at the top of the meadow where we have so often sat in the sunshine listening to the waterfall and the wind in the trees.

**Wyn & George Jamieson**

## To Harvest and Weed...

Watching a three pointer red deer bounding along the road in front of me that late autumn night en-route back to Dhanakosa with Dave, made me realise just how far my journey had taken me. Having meandered my way around the globe and lived in ten different cities and countries in as many years, that deer became a bizarre milestone in my passage through life.

A recent break-up in Germany, the latent affects of my divorce four years earlier, and my pending directorship in a gold mine in North West Africa, had thrust me into a surreal set of circumstances.

A few months earlier an old flame in Spain had e-mailed me and suggested I "*go on retreat*". The suggestion came with three links to places she knew. Dhanakosa was one of them; it seemed the most attractive, isolated and intriguing. However, I had no idea what a retreat was, and didn't quite know what to expect. Looking at the Dhanakosa calendar, one retreat stood out from the others, the 'Summer Solstice Retreat' – "*a time to stop, celebrate, reflect and refresh ourselves as we decide what we will harvest and what we must weed*". It certainly struck a chord deep in my soul.

A quick phone call and a chat to a Dhanakosa community member whose name I couldn't spell, nor pronounce had me booked into a retreat run by Larry Butler and Ratnadevi. A quick purchase on eBay, and I was the owner of a wonderful micro-camper called 'Bambi'. One week later, I was on the road and heading north to the Scottish highlands out of Cheltenham.



That one week retreat, summer of 2007, fixed a hole in my heart and had me back on my feet looking forward to the future - quite an amazing result. And, four and a half months on, as the autumn leaves carpet the glen, I am still here, living in 'Bambi' at Dhanakosa.

It turned out to be a productive and happy summer after being invited into Dhanakosa by The Community. Realising I was in a state of limbo (or, as Nayaka described it, 'bardo state') awaiting the outcome of my new appointment to the Australian/African mining company, the best I could do was sit it out and make the best of it. Coincidentally, Dhanakosa was in urgent need of a complete logo make-over and a re-vamp of their website. In my past life I had been a Creative Director in graphic design and advertising back in Singapore and Hong Kong, so this was right up my alley.

Now that my brief sojourn at Dhanakosa is complete and the new logo, website and 2008 programme are finished, a new tropical shore beckons. So, "Thank you Dhanakosa, for giving me the time to harvest and the time to weed".

**Mike**

## Nature Notes



Spring this year was spectacular in Balquhidder Glen, with weeks of unbroken blue skies - weather which particularly favours butterflies. The Orange Tip butterfly particularly appears to be expanding its range and was quite common this year. Another beautiful butterfly which the warm dry spring appeared to favour was the Dark Green Flatillery. This butterfly inhabits upland grassland and has local populations on Beinn an t-Sidhein and at the head of Kirkton Glen.

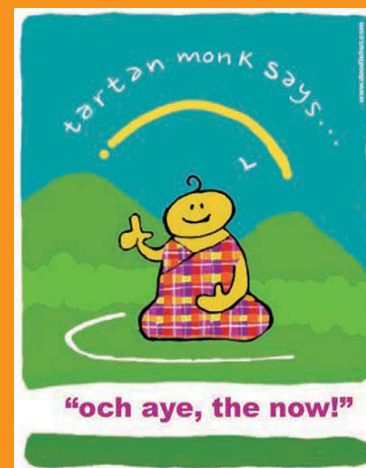
Although during the rest of the summer we did not have the amount of rainfall as there was down in parts of England, the summer was rather overcast. The highlight was probably an increase in the number of otter sightings. Otters are known to be resident on the Balvag river and we do get irregular reports elsewhere on Loch Voil. But this summer they have been seen on the loch shore and in the burn at Dhanakosa a number of times right through the breeding season, suggesting there may be animals resident on Loch Voil. However, these beautiful animals are rather elusive so please do not come expecting to see them! Easier to see have been the family of Roe deer who have taken up residence in the back field. Roe deer can of course do a lot of damage to young trees so I have been keeping a close eye on the situation, but so far the delight they have been giving visitors seems to outweigh the damage.

**Nayaka**

## Update on Jamie's prostrations

In the Spring our housekeeper, Jamie, announced he would be doing 100,000 prostrations over a period of time to raise money for Dhanakosa (see Spring 07 Newsletter). So far, over 5 months he has completed 11,000. Keep it up Jamie and watch those knees!

from  
the  
doodlehut.....



## Dhanakosa's New Neighbour



This summer after 11 years of living at the Dhanakosa community (and before that, 16 years of living in other Buddhist communities) I moved out to a wee house in the neighbouring village of Strathyre. For some time I had felt an increasing desire for solitude.

It seemed 'the introvert within' was becoming more and more demanding. Like all big changes this one brought very mixed feelings. There are certainly things I miss about living at Dhanakosa, but on the whole I am enjoying the change and the solitude. I still work for Dhanakosa, now dividing my time between working at home and commuting to Dhanakosa except when leading retreats when I stay in the retreat centre. The last 3 weeks I've been on retreat here and really enjoyed it, especially reconnecting with the landscape with a more meditative mind! While leading the meditations on the Shiatsu retreat I found it very natural to lead into the sittings evoking a sense of taking our place in the landscape, with the hills rising around us, the loch below (at its magical best at the end of summer). So hopefully living on my own while still working for Dhanakosa, I can take my place in both the landscape and in the ongoing life of the centre.

**Amoghavira**

DHANAKOSA 2007/2008  
**Recruitment**

Full time residential and volunteer opportunities currently available. See details at [www.dhanakosa.com/DKwork.htm](http://www.dhanakosa.com/DKwork.htm)

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# Retreat calendar 2008

## January

11 - 13 Yoga and Meditation weekend *intro*

25 - 01 Feb Focusing and Meditation *intro*

## February

01 - 08 Stilling and Seeing Through *fwbo reg*

08 - 15 Tai Chi and Chinese Medicine *intro*

29 - 02 Mar Introduction to Indian Head Massage weekend *intro*

## March

07 - 14 White Crane Spreads Its Wings (tai chi, poetry & meditation) *intro*

28 - 04 April Introduction to Meditation and Buddhism *intro*

To book a retreat please send a £50 deposit (for a week) or £30 (for a weekend) to the address below. Alternatively you can book with a credit card over the phone.

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