



Lots of Space

Highlights of an Introductory Retreat at Dhanakosa



Jo Burbidge

I'd chosen this retreat from the Dhanakosa

programme firstly to check out the "stunning setting" I'd heard about, secondly because the timing suited me (school holidays and just after a mini-solitary retreat), but mainly because it was a retreat without activity; a retreat with space.

The Introduction Retreat was full of space and choices: space and choice to walk by myself or with others, or not; talk to experienced meditators, other retreatants, or not at all; swim in the Loch or not (!) and space to read, practice Tai Chi on the patio and reflect. After a busy year at work and revitalization of my life, space and choices were exactly what I needed.

Following a warm welcome and settling in time, the team at Dhanakosa provided ideal conditions for meditation and Dharma practice. Gentle morning meditations to arrive, quietly wake up and open to the day; barefoot walking meditations in the sunshine on the lawn; body relaxation after fabulous lunches, fantastic dinners in the evening and some of the finest (and most interesting) pujas before bed. We were invited to try out different techniques for becoming interested and creative within meditation such as spotting the arising of vedana (feeling tone), and then really becoming interested in that tone rather than trying to ignore it or push it away.

In addition to the regular and various meditations mentioned above, we had daily group meetings to share experiences and ask questions about meditation and aspects of Dharma. Each evening we had talks by the team. I found the talk on the Noble Eightfold Path particularly useful. It was incredibly valuable in helping to identify and turf out some wrong views and beliefs that had already materialized! On one of the evenings the team told us their own stories of their paths to Buddhism and the FWBO. These life histories were a real treat to hear and most of all provided inspiration for my own path.



On the last full day, Nayaka took us all for a walk and picnic lunch, with a quick visit to Rob Roy's Grave and a stop for tea and cake on the way back; a great way to begin the integration back into daily life.

In general, memories can become hazy and unreliable, but some aspects of this retreat were particularly memorable:

- the warmth and kindness from the team
- relaxed meditations
- recognising growing confidence in myself
- developing an interest in feeling tones
- the joy of impermanence as a creative process

And, of course, lots of space.



Dhanakosa's New Kitchen Manager

My name is Claire and I am the new Kitchen Manager at Dhanakosa. I am originally from Australia and was in the midst of travelling when I came across the advertisement for staff needed at Dhanakosa. Since that moment I have been fortunate enough to become one of the first resident female members in the Dhanakosa community.



Claire Binnion

When I left my home in Australia over 9 months ago, I was following an instinct that (I hoped) was guiding me towards a more fulfilling life. I didn't have a clue where I would end up, but remained optimistic that a place existed where I would be happy and where I could make a positive contribution.

Spiritual awareness has been at the core of my life since I was a teenager, although I am only newly acquainted with the FWBO. I have become a mitra since arriving at Dhanakosa and feel a deep sense of gratitude to be a part of this organisation, and am clearly experiencing the benefits of living in a supportive spiritual environment with a structured practice.

Jamie's Farewell

My contact with Dhanakosa started with a retreat 10 years ago. I came on a lot of retreats in those early years and then started visiting the community for short stays. Eventually I moved up full time and I'd been there since 2003. That period came to an end in January when I moved back to Edinburgh and now I'm just beginning to appreciate what a huge effect this time has had on me.




Jamie Ward

Dhanakosa is a wonderful place and its magic and beauty has really touched me. There is such spaciousness in the environment which was a great relief for me. I was made very welcome in the community and joined in with activities and sometimes work too – there's always lots to do in a busy retreat centre! The continuity of living and working together gave me the chance to make friendships and to really get a taste of the Dharma which just wouldn't have happened otherwise. In a very real sense, it has given me my life.

On a practical level the teachings of the Dharma have affected me deeply, especially finding that I could express what was of value to me through my work. Eventually I became the first proper housekeeper that Dhanakosa has had and for me this was a good fit. I really enjoyed developing the role and in particular creating new systems which helped toward the smoother running of Dhanakosa. I also enjoyed and valued maintaining aesthetics and the standards of cleanliness that Dhiraka began. I have found it very rewarding and satisfying doing this work.

Life can be difficult, and it's not been easy for me but Dharma practice has made this much easier to be with and at times given me moments of real fulfilment. Often when I meditate my mind is so busy I can't even count to one! Now I don't give myself such a hard time about it, and I have found that the simple approach of body awareness through meditation and yoga works best for me. I have particularly benefited from formless meditation, which has been a great relief. I also discovered devotional practice; mantras, puja and prostrations help me connect with my heart.



Cooks Wanted!
Volunteering cooking opportunities currently available.
For more information ask for Claire, our friendly, resident Kitchen Manager.
Tel: +44 (0)1877 384213
Email: cooking@dhanakosa.org
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www.dhanakosa.com BUDDHIST RETREAT CENTRE

Update on Jamie's Prostrations

Although Jamie has not been doing the prostration practice for the last few months with all the upheaval of moving he still intends to continue the practice and keep raising money for Dhanakosa. See how many he has done in the next newsletter!



For all this I am more grateful than I can say. I want to thank everyone who has contributed to it through the years. There are many connections started there that I wish to keep going and I intend to return often to support retreats. My next project is to get stuck into working at the Edinburgh Buddhist Centre with Vajrahridaya. I might even see one or two of you down there!

(Thanks also to Bodhidaka for helping me write this article!)

Our New Housekeeper

It's the beginning of April and spring is creeping in. I arrived to join the team at Dhanakosa



Summer Gold

three months ago; it's been a very full and rich time settling into a new living and working situation. My position here is initially as Housekeeper, but with my history of being a bit of a Jill of all trades, I find myself constantly learning new things about the running of the centre, from taking payments to learning how to unblock the sewage - rich life indeed!

I first came to Dhanakosa about seven years ago and instantly fell in love with the place. Like so many people, I was one of those retreatants who didn't want to leave at the end of the week.

Since then I have been mainly living in Norwich, exploring possible paths for my life to take. At one point I was learning cabinet making and basic carpentry skills; this led on to me going to visit Akashavana in the spring of 2005 for two weeks to help build the community house. I thoroughly enjoyed the wildness of the place and felt drawn to joining the team of volunteers then. Somehow I still wasn't ready to let go and take a chance.....so, almost three years on and the thought of living and working in a Buddhist community was still strongly with me. Last October I was out with a friend kayaking down the rivers in Norwich and talking about life and future plans and again I talked about how I would like to live in a Buddhist community. The next day I went to the Norwich Buddhist Centre and saw a poster on the office desk: Dhanakosa were looking for staff. The rest, as they say, is history. I look forward to meeting you all, over time.

Yoga with Padmarashini



Padmarashini

I come up to Dhanakosa several times a year to teach yoga on some of the Yoga and Meditation retreats. These retreats offer great conditions to explore the practice of yoga more deeply than is often possible in a weekly class. Yoga is fairly mainstream these days, and many people enjoy its benefits for health, fitness and energy. Since I started yoga in the 80s the whole world of yoga has opened up, with an increasing range of styles and approaches to the practice and also an increasing interest in the more 'spiritual' aspects of yoga practice.

So on these retreats I am especially interested in exploring these aspects. One way of doing this is through texts such as the Yoga Sutra of Patanjali, another is by entering a process of enquiry whereby we explore our own interest and intention for yoga practice: what are the values or images we live by and how can we practice in a way that helps us to live those values? This is more the approach I take these days. On a training course with Donna Farhi a few years ago she said, "Ask yourself - who are you becoming through the practice?" This has stayed with me - who am I becoming...?

On retreats there is the luxury of time to go slowly and really take time to explore some of the core principles of yoga practice. Usually most people arrive on retreats tired from very full lives and so I always begin with practices to support relaxation, slowing down and opening the body in ways that nurtures free breathing. With this basis we can then explore how we give our weight to the earth and find support without over-exerting or collapsing. I like to balance a dynamic flowing practice with a quiet, more yin style of practice. Combined, they can nourish, build and circulate energy.

Yoga poses are not goals to be achieved but ways to explore and inhabit our bodies, hearts and minds. Approached this way, yoga is essentially an awareness practice. It helps us get out of our heads and into our bodies and to become increasingly sensitive and receptive to ourselves, to who we are and to the values and images we want to live by.



Notes from the Director

The last period has been a time of great change in the team at Dhanakosa.

Jamie, Neil and Vajrahridaya all left

the team around Christmas time. All three of them have made significant and distinctive contributions to Dhanakosa over the years they have been here and they will all be missed. Jamie and Vajrahridaya formed a great kitchen-housekeeping team with Jamie's attention to detail around the retreat centre and willingness to support retreat leaders and teams, and Vajrahridaya's friendly and supportive presence in the kitchen - and of course, great food! Neil's special contribution was in the area of publicity, particularly his consistent production of high quality posters and press adverts.

New on the team we have Claire, Summer and Prajnagita for five months, and Dharmavasini is now working part time. This is also a significant period as it marks the transition from a men's team to a mixed team. We have been discussing this for a number of years but the winds of change are now blowing and I am



Nayaka

happy to report that so far I am very pleased with how the new situation is shaping up. Work has also finally started on the house for myself, Dharmavasini and the children to live in. This project should be completed sometime in the autumn and will hopefully alleviate the accommodation crisis in the community house and give Dhanakosa stable management for the foreseeable future. These two changes (the mixed team and the house project) are part of an essentially pragmatic approach to maintaining the necessary skills, personalities and commitment needed to ensure the continuing effectiveness of Dhanakosa as a retreat centre and place of practice into the future.

Recruitment
Now recruiting a Marketing & Fundraising Manager
See details at www.dhanakosa.com
Or contact Nayaka on + 44 (0) 1877 384213
Or nayaka@dhanakosa.org

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WWW.DHANAKOSA.COM BUDDHIST RETREAT CENTRE

Retreat Highlights 2008

May 30 – June 6

The Radiance of Being *reg*

July 4 – 11

Intro to Meditation and Buddhism *intro*

Aug 29 – Sept 5

Clowning and Insight *intro*

Sept 5 – Sept 12

Shiatsu and Meditation *intro*

Sept 12 – Sept 19

Gay Men's Retreat *intro*

Sept 26 – Oct 3

Earth Rituals *intro*

Nov 28 – Dec 5

Dance and Meditation *intro*

Check www.dhanakosa.com for our full 2008 programme of retreats.

*Suggested donations: £315 / £235 / £155

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