

# Active Hope for Humanity

## Dhanakosa Retreat

29 March to 5 April 2024

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 [www.activehope.info/](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 shrineroom. Later in the morning we'll explore these special workshop exercises (see below for details). Then after lunch there'll be optional activities available to help us process and assimilate what gets stirred up.

These will include yoga and possibly chi-kung or dance. 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) but the team are available to meet up with if necessary. No prior experience will be assumed and all necessary tuition will be provided.

**NB. 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?**

Bring the customary waterproofs and boots as for any Dhanakosa retreat. 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 2023 retreat to give you a sense of what to expect in 2024.

### **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. 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.

eg. 'Widening Circles' aka 'Four Voices'

Sitting in groups of four, we take turns to describe an issue that concerns us. We do this (1) as oneself, (2) as someone who sees it differently (perhaps the opposite), (3) as a nonhuman affected by this issue, (4) as someone living in the future, still being affected. Meanwhile other three just listen and bear witness, holding the space.

### 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.

### **Feedback from the 2023 Retreat**

Ten of the eleven retreatants remembered to fill in forms at the end to evaluate, comment and offer suggestions. Here are their average ratings (out of 5) for the various aspects:

Information Provided	4.9
How the retreat was led, overall	4.8
Meditation teaching	4.8
Organisation	4.9
Standard of Accommodation	4.9
Food	4.9