

# voices of Dhanakosa

celebrating 25 years



# 25 years of Dhanakosa



## telling the story in different voices

Over the last 25 years, 42 people have lived and worked at Dhanakosa as part of the community. An indeterminate additional number have also given their time and energy as trustees, retreat leaders, organisers, cooks, and general volunteers. They have over that time sustained, endured and flourished: providing the conditions for somewhere in the order of 1,000 retreats over the 25 years of the project to date. That means somewhere over 20,000 people have come on retreat at Dhanakosa over the years, none of whom have been charged more than a booking fee, a real triumph of generosity.

This is the story as told by some of the people who made that possible.

# over the years

**1989** Property search begins

**1992**



Purchase of Ledcreich House by Geoffrey (Aranyaka) with rent-free lease to FWBO (Triratna) Glasgow

Dhanakosa holds first retreat in autumn

**1993** Sangharakshita visits Dhanakosa for formal opening ceremony

12 women ordained on a snowy two-and-a-half week retreat with 3 preceptors

**1997** Second lease signed and fundraising appeal is launched to buy Dhanakosa

Ajitasena ordained

**1998** Two solitary retreat huts and community shrine room built by Ajitasena

Sangharakshita visits Dhanakosa for 25 years of FWBO in Scotland celebrations

**2001** Nayaka ordained

**2002**



**10 YEARS OF DHANAKOSA:** Dhanakosa Trust forms to take over running of project (from FWBO Glasgow) and completes purchase of Dhanakosa with support of loan from Triodos Bank; giant redwood planted on Sangha day to commemorate

Smritiratna moves into Temple Cabin

Bodhidaka ordained

**2003** Eddie the cat moves in

Vajrahridaya becomes first kitchen manager, Dhanakosa starts providing a cook on most retreats

**2005** Major renovation of main house roof

Dhiraka ordained

**2007** Team becomes mixed community



**2009** Family house built; Nayaka, Dharmavasini and children move in, after 18 months in the community

**2010** Varadakini and Marion leave Bothy hut after four year retreat

**2011** Unprecedented snowfall causes first ever retreat cancellation!

## 2012

**20 YEARS OF DHANAKOSA:** New wing with disabled access built

Priyadasa ordained

**2013** Biomass eco-boiler installed



**2016** Redecoration of interior of house complete and last elements of Ledcreich  
Hotels finally disappear!

## 2017

**DHANAKOSA TURNS 25:** Hosts Scottish celebration of 50 years of Triratna

Eddie the cat dies

Monika invited for ordination, first woman from Dhanakosa to be so

## the property search, Kulaprabha

One day sometime in 1989 or thereabouts, Susiddhi the chairman of Glasgow Buddhist Centre rang me to ask if I'd be up for joining him and one or two other people to search for a country property for a retreat centre.

"Well what's involved and for how long?" I asked.

"Oh, just getting ourselves onto estate agents' lists and visiting likely properties. I don't think it'll take longer than six months", he said.

"OK, sounds good. I'm in."



So started the six month project which lasted three years!! It did involve more than Susiddhi had suggested. And, I got to be very good at creating financial spreadsheets showing that we stood a good chance of running a successful retreat centre and supporting a team of people to look after the place.

One day a glossy brochure dropped through my letterbox which announced "Buddhist Retreat Centre For Sale, Rural Dumfrieshire, in Forest. "Very Beautiful & Quiet." I'm not kidding!! Needless to say we drove down to view it asap and it was everything the brochure promised. It belonged to Kelsang Gyatso who had done a three year retreat there and it was used for solitary retreats for his disciples. It needed a lot of work but we were up for taking it on. Unfortunately in the end, they decided not to sell it after all.

Eventually I got a call to go up to Balquhider to view a smallish hotel which was up for sale. It was soon very clear that this place would be ideal for us. On our second visit, Geoffrey (now Aranyaka) and I were sitting up at the back of the field looking down on the property.

"Geoff", I said, "We mustn't lose this one."

"No", he replied.

His offer went in soon afterwards and was accepted. So began Dhanakosa. I've led lots of retreats up there since and love the place dearly.

# moving in, Aranyaka

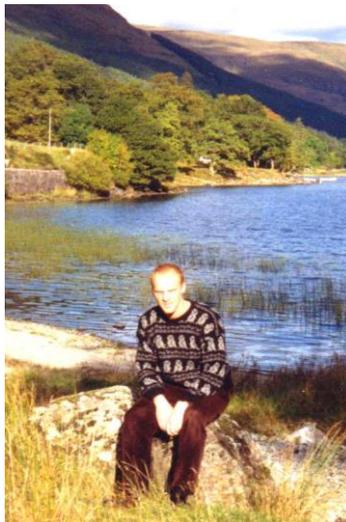
December 1989 – Heruka Community, Glasgow:

Me : “Ehh Susiddhi, I know you're about to go off on the Winter retreat but there's something I'd like to talk to you about.... *awkward pause*.... eh hh I'm thinking of buying a property... which maybe could be used for the Scottish Retreat Centre Project”....  
Susiddhi: “Oh aye... well I'm busy just now, I guess we can talk about it when I get back....”

Summer 1992: 3 years of discussions, meetings, searchings and a couple of abortive attempted purchases later... parking in the lay-by in front of Craighuie house with Varaghosa. Balquhiddie Glen and Loch Voil already working its magic... “Aye this will do” (kind of understated isn't it!)

September 1992: shovelling money into a payphone (remember those) in Cambuslang fire station finalising the purchase offer with the solicitor hoping the bells wouldn't go off. I was working as a part-time fire man at the time!

Varaghosa spent the first night there alone the day after the purchase– who gets the chance to do that these days!



The first winter was a bit challenging.

I remember driving up in the middle of a bitter night a month or so after we bought it to do battle with a frozen oil pipe armed only with a hairdryer to help out a single guest stranded without heat. The supply chain was a bit tenuous in those days too and I remember leaving a night shift, packing the car full of provisions from 'Roots and Fruits' for the weekend ahead. There are of course many more tales to be told of teething, but maybe they will need to wait until the Golden Anniversary!

So the journey began to the much-loved 'thin place' that is Dhanakosa today.

## early retreats, Amoghavira

When Geoffrey bought Ledcreich House I was living in Glasgow working on the centre team at the Glasgow Buddhist Centre. I was asked to lead the first public retreat there; a Yoga weekend with Jenny Livingstone and Agracitta. We used what is now Room 9 for the shrine room, I think the current shrine room wasn't ready for use by then. Not surprisingly I don't remember much about the weekend. I do remember how impressed people were with the retreat centre and especially were blown away with the landscape; the mountains woods and the shimmering waters of Loch Voil.

I fell in love with the place.



So I volunteered to lead or be on the team for as many retreats as I could over the coming 4 years. The retreat programme was rather sparse in those early years compared with how it is now and most retreatants came from the Central belt of Scotland. I remember particularly the 2 week summer retreats we held which were led by Order members from the Glasgow Buddhist Centre. These were high energy affairs and vivid in my memory is practically the whole retreat playing football on the front lawn. Hillwalking weekends were an early development in the programme which were led by myself, Vimalavajra and Jinavamsa - only munros were on the agenda here. I remember us taking the whole retreat up mountains like Stob Binnien and Schiehallion, with the last back down the hill some 3 hours later than the first. A far cry from the retreats we run now with 3 led groups of up to 10, with the lower hills around Dhanakosa forming the bulk of our itinerary, with more emphasis on taking time to practice awareness in nature than getting to the top of something big and pointy!

After 4 years of helping out on and leading retreats it seemed a natural to move up to Dhanakosa so in May 1996 I moved in as a resident retreat leader.

A whole new chapter in my life had begun.

## around the second lease, Nayaka

In January 1996, I arrived at Dhanakosa with the intention of spending three months helping out as a volunteer. I was 26, and on the threshold of a career in scientific research – but research science, interesting though it was, was not quite enough to hold my restless spirit. Dhanakosa on the other hand was unstable and unknown enough to be exciting. The project was very much still in the fragile early phase of life, and I could not help myself but have a go and see what I could contribute. At 26 and with no commitments...

There was nothing to lose.



Initially life was about painting windows, running lifts, and just generally making myself useful. But, as the year went on it became obvious that I would need other skills. Most of my life I had been a bit dismissive of “management” and particularly “financial management”, but these were now the skills I had to learn. At the time we had a rent free lease from Aranyaka (Geoffrey as he was then) and the lease ran out in 1997. I realised we had a lot of work to do to come up with a plan for the future that was plausible enough to convince everyone involved that not only was a renewal of the lease possible, but that maybe we could make enough of a run of it to own the place ourselves one day. Mixing financial planning and negotiating skills with muddling through maintenance jobs, and wandering the hills in my spare time, I set about trying to work out what it was to have a genuinely spiritually based but economically successful Buddhist organisation.

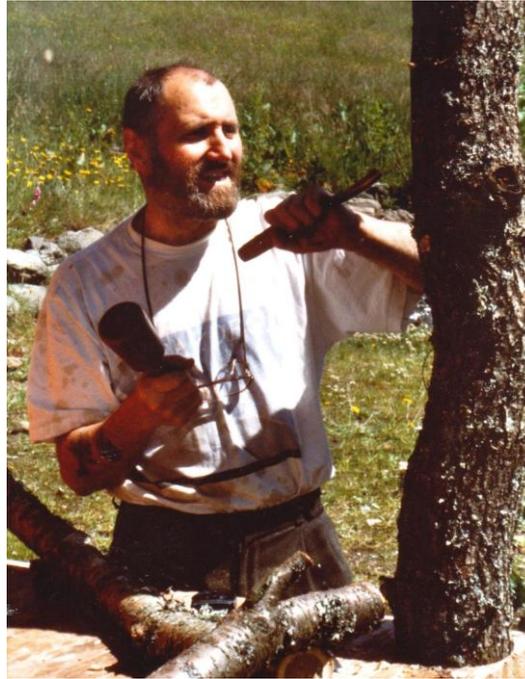
Little did I know this was only the start of the learning curve and the start of a long association with Dhanakosa.

## building the Bothy, Ajitasena

*Excerpt taken from Ajitasena's entry on the front page of the welcome book from 2000:*

'The Bothy was built in 1998 to provide a refuge for those brave souls on a spiritual journey. It has provided a temporary resting place to various people and I trust you will find your time in Glen Crotha to be meaningful in your quest. I feel privileged to have been involved in the design and construction of this little wooden building.

Your presence here  
gives my efforts and  
practice meaning.



Thank you for coming, for meditating, for caring, for being. I am about to leave Dhanakosa after six years, and it has been an amazing experience.'

Mind set free in the Dharma Realm  
I sit at the moon filled window  
Watching the mountains with my ears  
Hearing the burn with my open eyes  
Each molecule preaches the law  
Each moment chants the sutra  
The most fleeting thought is timeless  
A single hears enough to stir the ocean

*Poem written by Shutakh*

## fundraising to buy Dhanakosa, Dhiraka

I joined the Dhanakosa team in 2000 aged 25. Young and inspired I wanted to deepen my dharma practice and train for ordination. I was so green. The 'maintenance' job I initially enquired about had just been filled. Fortunately, Nayaka persuaded the council to expand the team to accommodate a fundraiser. I had a little experience of that kind of work so decided - why not?!

The fundraising was a huge challenge - especially directly asking for money on retreats. I was much happier writing applications to trust funds from the safety of my desk. We also had some fun events like the *Beat Poetry Evening* and '*Sally's Sponsored Swim*' of Loch Voil!

And I planted  
hundreds of  
sponsored trees.



An abiding memory of the whole period is of the massive festival weekends which gave me an opportunity to promote the fundraising - I remember fear, excitement and remarkable generosity.

In the end we made the target, secured a mortgage, and the newly formed Dhanakosa Trust bought the property. This success was a team effort - a sangha effort. That sangha includes all the people, from far and wide, who love Dhanakosa - many of whom it turned out were not connected with any other dharma centre. I got to experience what it means to people to have a 'spiritual home'. I was the fortunate one who got to witness, directly and tangibly every week, their gratitude. It was a humbling experience that has profoundly shaped my Dharma life ever since. Though I didn't know it at the time, fundraising was exactly the dharma practice I was so desperately seeking aged 25. Aged 32 and newly ordained I left. I often return, more grateful as the years go by for the continuing efforts of successive Dhanakosa teams.

## gifts of Dhanakosa, Khemaka

I first entered the thin place of Balquhiddy in August 1996 for a working retreat. In amongst painting windows and painting more windows there was some teaching and meditation. By some Dhanakosa magic, it turned out to be a life-changing (me-changing) week. Blown away, devastated and hastily re-assembled in time to go home.

Things could never be the same.



Two years later, I became a mitra when Sangharakshita visited Dhanakosa for the celebrations marking 25 years of the FWBO in Scotland. Some months earlier, when I asked to be a mitra, I was asked who I would like to conduct the ceremony. I said “Sangharakshita but I know that’s not possible”. Did I mention the magic of Dhanakosa? In 2004 I had the great privilege of being ordained at Dhanakosa. The lounge area was packed with family, friends and the Scottish sangha.

So how could I repay the incredible gifts Dhanakosa and everyone there had given me? Well, I couldn’t, but I offered a little back through becoming a Trustee. For about seven years I was treasurer, minute taker and support for the Director, spending lots of time with Nayaka and the team trying to be helpful through bringing my experience as a senior manager in the voluntary sector.

After seven years I took a break but re-joined the Board almost two years ago. Coming back, I confirmed what I already knew: that Dhanakosa is in very good hands. Although the membership of the team changes over the years, Dhanakosa goes from strength to strength, creating an invaluable resource in Scotland for people new to the Dharma right through to very experienced Buddhists.

Someone in the local group I attend described what she loved about Dhanakosa as “silent acceptance”. That feels about right.

## life at Dhanakosa, Smritiratna

I had never been to Dhanakosa when in March 1996 young Dunstan picked me up from Stirling railway station. He introduced himself as a volunteer at Dhanakosa and drove me back down the roads and along that winding lane by Loch Voil which seemed to lead further and further into the wilds. I came to live at Dhanakosa a few weeks later, staying that first year as an unpaid volunteer. Back then Dhanakosa was losing money and its future was uncertain.

However in 1997 I was taken on as housekeeper, co-founded the group in Stirling and was soon teaching meditation on week retreats - also monthly day retreats as from 2000. Twenty-one years since we first met, young Dunstan has since become Nayaka our Centre Director. Meanwhile I'm no longer housekeeper, still teaching on retreats but now living in the woods a mile from Dhanakosa. I moved into Temple Cabin in 2002 needing time alone to reflect on life and the Dharma. I had just taken a vow of chastity and used to wear yellow monastic robes when I led retreats. No longer an anagarika,

I still love it here at Temple Cabin,  
still love teaching on retreats,  
sharing what I love.



Since 1997 I have led the annual men's winter retreat (except for 2000-2003) and also teach on five or six other week retreats at Dhanakosa each year. When I first came to Dhanakosa there was grim talk about the centre's uncertain future, but 21 years later it's great to see the place thriving and now in it's 25th year.

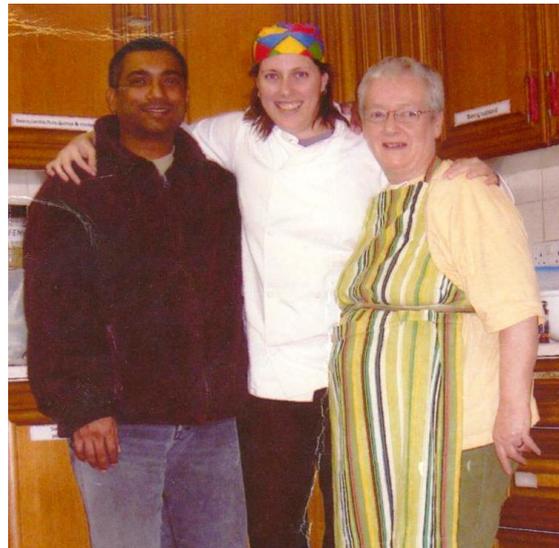
## cooking as practice, Danabhadri

When I open the door of the kitchen at Dhanakosa I am in touch with an energy that isn't mine - I don't understand it and I don't try to.

I first found my way into the kitchen at Dhanakosa sometime in the late 1990s, in the days when retreats were self catering, with all the stress and uncertainty that went along with that.

The first stage of moving to having cooks happened while I was quite ill with M.E. There were a few volunteer cooks and oh what luck if the retreat you were on had one! At this point cooking for 25/30 people was the last thing on my mind. As my health improved I helped Smritiratna with a few introductory retreats. One autumn in 2003 on a small retreat I decided to have a bash at cooking for the retreat. The team was more than capable of managing the retreat without me so I reasoned that if I fell flat on my back it wasn't going to be a huge crisis. So I cooked for the last few days of the retreat and I enjoyed it immensely.

I was launched as a cook!



When I was 60, I remember saying that cooking was a practice of impermanence as I could count on the fingers of both hands the number of years I would be able to cook for a full retreat. And, although I seem to have sprouted a few extra fingers, it has been a practice in all sorts of ways - I joke with friends that I cooked my way to ordination (and beyond) but there is truth in the joke, everything for spiritual development is there in the kitchen.

Sangharakshita said that work is the tantric guru; well I found my Guru in the kitchen.

## changes in the community, Nayaka

In 2006 I was living near Inverness with two young children. Still supported by Dhanaksoa to work for the movement but aware that this was increasingly unsustainable. I wrote to the trustees saying I did not see how I could raise a family on support and was starting to look for alternative work. However, fate intervened. The other two members of the Dhanakosa management group both had also said they wanted to leave and, as those of you were were around at the time will remember, it was a real low ebb of interest in right livelihood and community. There was just nobody coming forward.

After over six months of discussion it was agreed that I would come back as centre director and “do what I could to rebuild a management team” and that Dhanakosa would support us as a family. We moved back in September 2006. It was a hugely committing step for both us and Dhanakosa. I really needed to know we had the support of the trustees and the team even though at that time I could only guess at how much more vulnerable I would feel responsible not just for myself, but for my children as well. We also had to be radical about recruitment.

To have a mixed team at a retreat centre (let alone a family!) is still controversial in some quarters of the movement.



Not only that but we had to take people on who had relatively little previous Triratna experience. Clare, who was one of the first women to join the team (along with Summer) had not even heard of Triratna before! (she is now back in Australia where she is continues to be involved with her local centre). It all came with lots of challenges and was a major shift in the team and community. Maybe it was a survival strategy. But we came up with a positive alternative approach to meet what the community and project needed. And strongly engaged with what it would take to make it work; both organisationally and spiritually. We are still here to tell the tale... and thriving.

## tending the gardens, Dharmavasini

I moved to Dhanakosa in July 2007 with Nayaka, Rosie (who was just two) and Ben, one. We lived with the community for 18 months until the new house (with the grass roof) was completed in January 2009. It took a bit of time to 'find my feet' in the team, to see what was the 'best fit' given my skills and limited time. Dhiraka had left in 2006 and Dhanakosa was without a gardener until I agreed to take it on, probably around 2010. So there was a bit of catching up to do. I am not trained (you can probably tell!) but I love the work and have learned 'on the job' as it were. I guess, you could say, I have a feel for it, but it's all been by trial and error. I love that about the gardens – you can shape it, but you cannot control it! The vision is simple; the landscape is stunning and there are always surprises as well as disasters - sheep incursion and deer come to mind.

Perhaps, we should become  
a deer park, as in the  
Buddha's day!



But, nature is very forgiving (at least, on this scale). Of course, there's always much more I could do and perhaps inevitably my 5 year plan becomes a 10 year one. As well as tending the garden, there are living beings to think about and what conditions they need to grow.

I have to say, for all its challenges; it is for me a labour of love.

*\*Dhiraka looked after the gardens and grounds from - to 2006. Before that Tejini was a regular volunteer in the Dhanakosa gardens. Many thanks to them both.*

## organising on retreats, Jamie

I went on my first retreat at Dhanakosa in 1998. In 2000 I stayed with the community for a few days. I continued to stay for longer periods of time over the next couple of years, until I finally moved in permanently; living and working there until 2008. I began organising retreats in 2001 and have continued to do so since then.

I've organised over 150 retreats, which means I've been on retreat with a lot of people.



Dhanakosa has been hugely important in my life. Some of my most important friendships have come through living and working there. At times I was overwhelmed and confused by people there taking an interest in me and being kind, it was not something I was used to.

Dhanakosa continues to be a place where I feel all these rich connections to people. It's a place where these connections and many other threads of my life interweave, like a spider's web, intricate, delicate and beautiful.

I have a strong sense of Padmasambhava at Dhanakosa, there's something about the sense of space and being held in the landscape and in his presence; some connection for me between his eyes and the loch. When I used to have nightmares I would chant his mantra or he would appear in my dreams to help me to turn towards the terror I was experiencing. I was often really suffering, yet could see through painful mental states and would have the experience of being held in awareness by Padmasambhava and the landscape around Dhanakosa.

I deeply value retreats, the space they offer and all that that brings. Organising retreats allows me to offer practical support and by sharing my own Dharma practice I can help encourage and support others to live more deeply.

## training for ordination, Monika

Going deeper with my practice, being more serious about it, was one of the main factors when I decided to come to Dhanakosa to work and live. Actually I think that going through the ordination training in such a vibrant place was the best decision I made in my adult life! Not the easiest place to live at times, but hey! Is there such a place anyway?

Soon after mitra ceremony I asked for ordination, which for me meant integrating all aspects of life so I could bring the whole of myself to the practice. With such high task I knew I had to change a lot. I'd lived long enough to see what the world can offer, but at that time my attitude changed into 'what can I offer to the world?'

I also knew that on my own,  
I could do very little.



Firstly I needed to change myself, my habits, conditions...The opportunity arose nearly immediately and I was ready and determined to change self and world! I moved into Dhanakosa Community in March 2013 and can truly say that this place is all about change. The change within, becoming more integrated and positive as well as constant external change in the Community and of course change around accommodating different retreats almost every week - which in turn changes those who come on retreats. Within such dynamic and unique way of living, the Magic happens - the invisible flow of generosity, kindness, sharing humanity, sometimes tears, simply being together and supporting each other to grow.

When I asked for Ordination, I was clearly looking for something real, even had a glimpse of it, but still had no idea what it was. Now just as I am getting ready for the Ordination Retreat, I know a little bit more, I know that conditions matter, and that I found what I was looking for within such a supportive context.

And this is just the beginning of my spiritual journey....

## happy indeed we live, Ben

Two and half years have now past since I moved here, following an irresistible yearning to go forth into the unknown and commit myself more fully to the Dharma life. It truly is a privilege to call this place my home. Every day has been unique, always something new to learn about myself, some greater depth of communication with others, noticing the constant change of the seasons, the constant flow of one week to the next, one retreat to the next, meeting retreat leaders and volunteers as they pass through.

Although I've been staying mainly in one place (with occasional trips to Glasgow and Padmaloka) life has felt like a great adventure.



It's certainly much more fulfilling than my old customer services job in a Cardiff call centre. Here all of my energies can be more easily channelled into the same direction. It's a livelihood where I know everything I do is entirely congruent with my ideals. Furthermore, the people who I work with are not only colleagues, but good friends as well. We share our time, our reflections, our study of the Dharma, our interests in music and books and films, we dance and sing together.

My gratitude is immense for having this precious opportunity and I recognise that my good fortune is due to the past good actions of many beings throughout the years.

My heartfelt thanks to Bhante for his teaching and founding the movement, to the Dhanakosa community past and present, and to everyone who has contributed to making Dhanakosa what it is.