

# MANDALA *news*

The newsletter of the



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## The Triratna Buddhist Community: a new name for our movement

Padmasuri reflects on a historic moment

When I was ordained into the Western Buddhist Order (WBO) in 1980, the kesa I received had the insignia of the Dharmachakra - the wheel of the Dharma - as had been the case since the Order's beginnings in 1968. A few months later, Sangharakshita (our movement's founder whom we call Bhante, which means teacher) felt that

the emblem of the Three Jewels would be a more appropriate symbol for our Order: the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha jewels being the three most precious things upon which a Buddhist can rely; and they represented the centrality of what we go for refuge to at the time of ordination. And so we exchanged old kesas for new ones, now with the Three Jewels emblazoned on them. We burned the old ones in a magnificent outdoor ceremony during an order convention.

At my ordination, I became known as 'Upasaka' Padmasuri. Shortly afterwards, Sangharakshita decided to drop the title Upasaka, which in the East has the meaning of 'lay devotee of the Buddha'. Instead, Order members became Dharmacharis (male) and Dharmacharinis (female), meaning 'one who walks in the Dharma'. So, I became Dharmacharini Padmasuri. These two transformations signified a clearer emphasis for essential Dharma practice of contemporary Buddhists.

Sangharakshita came up with the nomenclature: 'Triratna' (three jewels in Sanskrit). He wrote around the whole Order, suggesting that we adopt it throughout the Order and the movement forthwith.

Two years after my ordination I went to live and work in India. While the nomenclature WBO and FWBO worked well in the western world, it did not sit comfortably in India. Understandably, 'Western' was not deemed suitable. From the beginning, the Indian wing of the movement was named differently: Trailokya Bauddha Mahasangha Sahayak



Gana, (TBMSG). I seem to recall that the idea of a common name, enabling a clear identity worldwide, was considered. Kesas had been changed to draw out the centrality of going for refuge to the Three Jewels; 'Upasakas' had become 'Dharmacharis'. Perhaps the next thing would be a movement-wide name change. In the event, no amendments were made, discussions were shelved for many years, and the change didn't happen for a further 28 years.

Around the millennium, the issue of name change was raised again. This time the dialogue was movement-wide: both east and west. Various names were put forward and argued back and forth without agreement. Some felt we shouldn't change the name. They were perfectly happy with 'western' for the west. We had always had different names, why couldn't we continue? However, by then it wasn't only an issue in India – Dharma activities of the FWBO were happening in Malaysia, Russia, Mexico, South Africa and Sri Lanka. 'Western', in these and still other countries, was problematic. Many were keen to change the name.

However, once again, despite months of dialogue, no agreement was reached as to a suitable name; once more the debate was shelved.

In January of this year, Indian members of our Order approached Sangharakshita with a written request that the name of our Order be changed so as to have one clear and appropriate identity worldwide. This time, it happened and, in the event, rather suddenly. Sangharakshita came up with the nomenclature: 'Triratna' (three jewels in Sanskrit). He wrote around the whole Order, suggesting that we adopt it throughout the Order and the movement forthwith. Further suggestions and clarification for the naming of the wider movement were put to Sangharakshita from the FWBO chairmen's meeting; he agreed to these. The movement (formerly FWBO) has become the Triratna Buddhist Community, while the Order (formerly WBO) becomes the Triratna Buddhist Order, with the express wish from Sangharakshita that neither title be shortened to initials.

The Indian wing is very happy with the change and adopted it straight away. I know that, immediately after the announcement, New Zealand Sangha

members held a ritual to mark the change. On 8th April, the anniversary of the founding of our Order, the name of the Order was changed across the rest of the world, so that in future the founding of the Western Buddhist Order and renaming to the Triratna Buddhist Order can be celebrated on the same day. Wesak, the celebration of the Buddha's birth, enlightenment and death, marked the official name change of the community. Many have been relieved that Sangharakshita made this decision while he is still with us.

A lot of us were attracted to Buddhism and the FWBO because the word 'western' immediately spelled out that the Dharma was relevant to us in the west without the need to take on alien cultural accretions of eastern Buddhism.

### **Wesak, the celebration of the Buddha's birth, enlightenment and death, marked the official name change of the community.**

There is, it has to be said, concern that the Indian word 'Triratna', while undoubtedly appropriate in meaning when translated, might make us look from the outside like centres and a community for 'foreign' cultural Buddhism, rather than the radical stance that Sangharakshita, his disciples and students have always taken in presenting Buddhism for modern western men and women.

We are a contemporary Buddhist movement and I think that comes across in our publicity (most people contact us if not through word of mouth then through our websites), in the way we teach and certainly in the way we lead our lives and make connections with others.

Personally, while feeling a tinge of regret at losing 'western', I feel happy enough to use the word Triratna, with a preference for it being untranslated wherever we are in the world so that it is recognisable in any language. And who knows, I may find talking with a beginner about the meaning of 'Triratana', more of a starting point for what Buddhism is, than assumptions they may have about 'western'. Thus, I have become Dharmacharini Padmasuri of the Triratna Buddhist Order!

## **Padmasambhava Day**

Did you notice that the exciting programme for this year's Padmasambhava Celebrations included children's activities?

The planning team were keen to include the younger members of the Sangha and to this end planned some specific activities for children. These included a story telling session recounting the tale of Padmasambhava and his transforming powers, mask making, drama and music making. The masks proved particularly useful later when the celebrations culminated in a magical puja!



The team of volunteers who led the children's activities were delighted to welcome Lea and Ash, pictured here to the Centre. We all agreed that Lea and Ash contributed enormously to the spirit and the energy of the day and we hope that they will be able to come to the next Festival Day. There are plans to provide more Dharma activities for children during Festival Days - call Jan Osborne on 01354 638127 to find out more.



# Musing Time

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## Vajradevi reflects on her exciting new role at the Centre

It's a Thursday afternoon and Lee and I are in our Right Livelihood Meeting. We're looking into Myers Briggs psychological types. I'm astonished to see that I've gone up to 88% feeling type. I'm sure the last time I did it I was around 30%!

Vajrapriya has recently done a weekend event with Dhammaloka on psychological types and now, whenever I tell him about an issue at the Centre where I'm feeling a bit over-responsible or trying to help someone to get what they want, he'll say, 'That's your extraverted feeling function'!

Amritasukha reckons our office team are all 'feeling' types, which is one of the reasons we enjoy working together. One way or another, 'feeling' seems to feature when it comes to me and my new role as Director in the Buddhist Centre. With taking on the role, I felt pretty clear I was moving into a new phase, which was less about long meditation retreats and inner processes and more about communication with others and, you've got it, feelings!

Before the long meditation retreats, I worked for seven years on the 'Aranya Project', now known as 'Akashavana' - the Triratna women's ordination retreat centre in Spain. The job involved lots of fundraising, then years of trawling around mountains in continental Europe looking for the right property. For the last year and a half of the project, I lived in Spain and helped to oversee a complex building project involving much communication with our delightful builders involving charades, dictionaries and crossed fingers.

I was attracted to the job at the Centre because it involves three things I enjoy doing: managing, fundraising and teaching. The job as originally advertised involved a lot of finance work, but, with Lee on board as our new accountant, the job description was changed sufficiently to warrant a change in title from Manager to Director. Specifically, the Trustees wanted to see the Centre used more during the day as it's often empty. I was also keen to work once again in a Team Based Right Livelihood context, particularly to work in an environment with others who shared common values. During my first couple of months, I was most strongly struck by how much I enjoyed meetings: meetings with



people whose spiritual maturity, broad perspective, kindness and concern for others was a delight to be around.

I've been here about six months now and the massive amount of information that any new job requires ingesting has slowed down. I'm finding my feet. I don't really have a typical day, but there is a fairly consistent start to it. The team will salute the shrine in our office in the basement and then report in. This ritual of bowing to the Buddha and then sharing with each other how we are, what's on our minds, how our practice is going is simple but feels as if in a short space of time we're becoming friends, with care and interest being the currency between us.

Some days I'll meet with a lot of people. It's great when someone has an idea and the Centre can offer support that helps something get off the ground. The Young Peoples group has been like that: they have some fantastic ideas, like the recent public dharma talks on Jesus Green. The Centre has the resources to help with publicity or to provide a venue when needed. I might meet with an Order Member who would like to teach but isn't sure where to start, or with Tejasvini to plan some events for women, or with Vajrapriya to train me how to use the projector for our new Film Nights.

Other weeks, I'll work more with volunteers who are offering their time and skills to the Centre. This week about a dozen people have been painting the lobby and foyer areas, so I have led morning meditations and provided lunch for them. It has been lovely to see the mutual benefits as people experience a taste of working together with other Buddhists as well as the Centre looking so much brighter and fresher.

My least favourite days are when I don't leave the computer much and seemingly endless emails demand responses. Subhuti, an experienced Order Member, is coming to the Centre in the autumn to lead a weekend event and the arrangements thus far have taken about 30 emails! I try to take some time regularly to sit in a comfy chair in the office and have some thinking time, so I'm not too caught up in the demands of the moment, but able to take a longer term view. Also important is 'musing time' when new ideas can emerge.

This autumn I will start to do a bit more teaching, which I'm very much looking forward to. There are other projects in the pipeline stretching until next summer. It's an exciting time to be working at the Centre and I very much look forward to seeing how it all unfolds.

# The development of the Festival Theatre

## Amritasukha talks about his vision



Does anyone actually have a clear idea what the theatre looked like before I started painting it? I always thought the colours were cold, uninviting, illuminated by the harsh light of strip lights. It sometimes reminded me of a disused ante-chamber to one of the lesser known entrances to Hades.

A couple of years ago I went around to talk to Ruchiraketu about what to do with the grubby calico curtains hanging on the sides of the stage. I had a better way of hanging them. He said, 'I'd been wondering how to take the theatre forward'. I said, 'Well, actually, I've got lots of other ideas on how improve the place'. For those of you who don't know me, I've got a visual arts background (mainly painting) as well as having done maintenance and shop fitting jobs. So, it looks like I was the right person at the right time. I was also unemployed at the time, so I was available. I knew the Centre couldn't support someone else full time, so I suggested they employ me for 10 hours per week. For our sister theatre, the Theatre Royal Bury St Edmunds, they spent £5.6 million and I was going to try to do something with a tiny fraction of that and a lot of ingenuity!

Whilst I preferred to paint on large canvases, I viewed the theatre with a degree of trepidation: this was far larger than any canvas I had ever painted on! This didn't worry Ruchiraketu. He said, 'If the colour scheme doesn't work, we'll just do another one. It's only paint, it won't cost that much'.

I started doing a lot of research about the theatre, tried to find what it looked like at different times during its history. My personal favourite was the 1926-1937 Art Deco period. Not only was it the first theatre in the UK to have a solid cyclorama (the curved white wall at the back of the stage) but it was probably the most influential experimental theatre in its time. My only reservation was the particular scheme (cool dark greens, black, silver and gold) seemed inappropriate for a Buddhist Centre. I wanted something that was both inspired by Art Deco and had some connection with the Buddhist tradition: a crossover, or meeting point between East and West. This was also the idea behind the dharmachakra painting in the lunette above the stage.

I painted quite a few possible colour schemes on scraps of wood. Have you noticed how the relationships between colours change depending on the light? Well, a scrap of wood was one thing. The theatre was on a different scale altogether. Maybe one or two of you might remember a couple of sections of the first circle being painted in a few different colour combinations. I think I must have painted three different colour schemes. I rather liked the one with cherry red, deep pink, black and white. The Project Committee chose the present colour scheme.

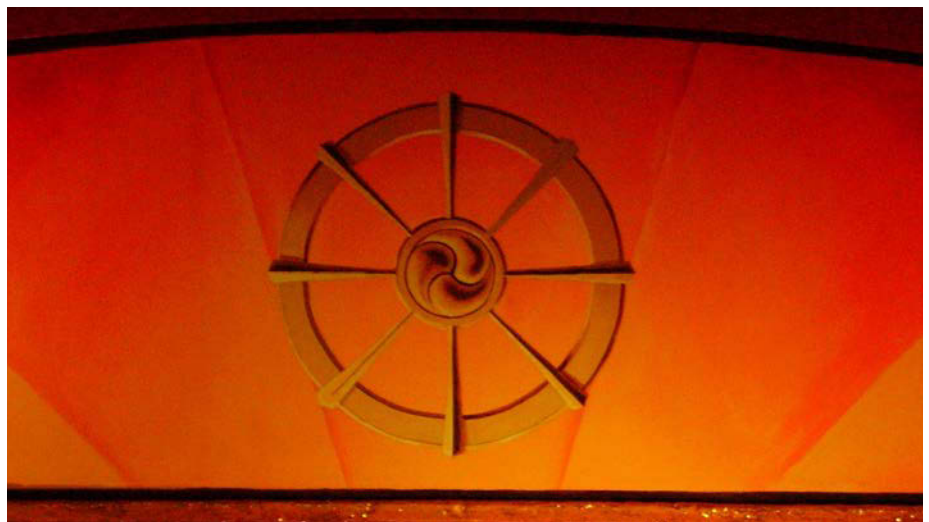
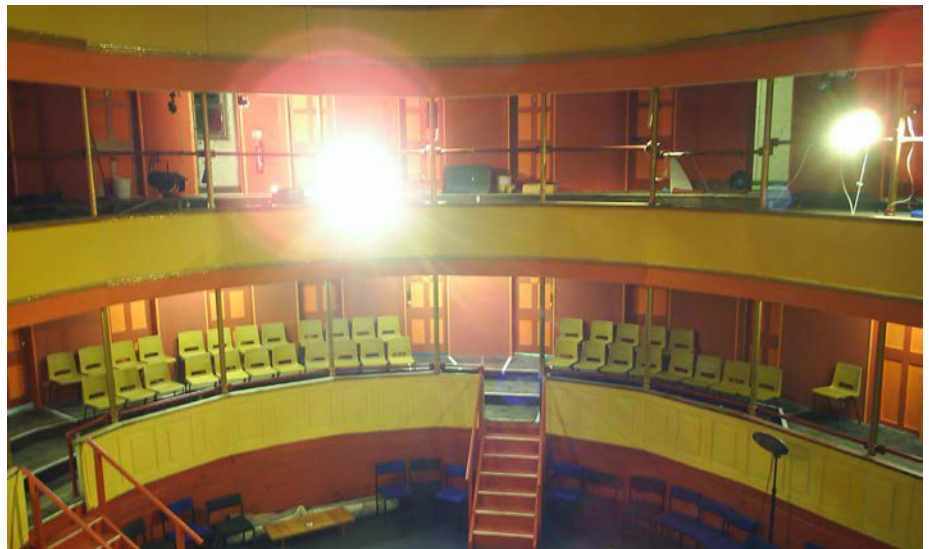
Maybe it seems strange, but although I can paint decent quality large scale murals I had little experience of painting large areas of flat colour, or woodwork. Additionally, I knew nothing about flame and fire retardant paints. The learning curves have been steep. I've also had a bit of problem with vertigo in the past. I don't know if you know about vertigo, but, when you are near a cliff edge or the top of a building, not only do you feel fear of the height but you want to throw yourself off as well. Believe me, it's a strange fascination. Fortunately, I'm over most of my vertigo!

Most of the paintwork has been straightforward, although some areas required more thought. The trickiest piece was the painting in the lunette. I'd taken reasonably good measurements and re-checked them. I made the painting as three individual canvases on the stage. I was sure that when I eventually tried to mount the painting I'd cry, 'OMG! Some of my measurements were wrong, the whole thing is too long and I can't cut it down to fit!' As it turned out, fitting was relatively straightforward. It sits in a groove about 5 cm in front of Queen Vic's coat of arms, so it also protects the older painting. It's about 7 metres (21 feet) long and just over 1 metre (3 feet) at its highest. It's painted in flame retardant emulsion.



Now we have new chairs, and don't they make the place look so much better? There's new lighting in the first circle. I'm hoping to extend this to the second circle at some point, maybe even to the corridor around the auditorium. One section of the first circle will be made wheelchair accessible. We're going to reduce the draughts from around the back of the cyclorama. Our architect is working on plans for underfloor central heating in the Pit. So, after talking about it for 10 years, we might finally get it! We're trying to find a grant towards this and for insulating the foyer.

I had already designed a new shrine, but that's going to have to be re-designed once the new heating system is in place. I want to put a recurring motif on the fronts of the circles, probably an Art Deco-style lotus. There's talk of having a proper stage curtain. Once we fulfil all of the Fire Officer's requirements we'll be able to use the second circle for audience when we do anything on the scale of our pantomimes. I'd like to have enough infrastructures in place for us to be able to hire extra stage lighting for any future stage productions. I have a number of other ideas, but I'm going to keep them to myself for the time being! Having ideas isn't a problem, but at some point money to fund them will be. I just hope I get enough of the work done before we have to start fundraising.



## Cymbelline, The Musical

### Francesca Raphaely reviews this year's panto

Late in January, a traditionally grey and miserable time of year was given a burst of energy and colour with the extremely untraditional Cymbelline, The Musical.

Following in the footsteps of Snow White two years ago, the panto was written and directed by Locana. It involved an incredible 20+ members of the Sangha in its cast, not to mention backing music from Yashodaka, Padmakirti, Sahananda and Michael Traynor, a host of lighting, backstage and technical supporters, and cameos from Vajraketu and Padmasuri.

With this number of people involved, a Shakespeare play was a great choice. It gave everyone something to do – even if the resulting complexity of the plot made

the event somewhat of a marathon effort for both cast and audience!

The panto opened with an unruly, idiosyncratic and overambitious meditation group deciding to 'purify their energies' through the arts. This clever frame set just the right tone: tongue-in-cheek, self-knowing, and affectionate.

A smorgasbord of send-up and silliness followed, in which no-one was ashamed to look shambolic – from a fearless rendition of I'm too Sexy by a blonde-wigged Gary Mooney and overdramatic histrionics by Mary Wild and Felicity Cook, to dreadful jokes from Roman soldiers, ridiculous love tokens in the form of flashing ducks, waltzing bears, and considerable quantities of ABBA.

On top of all this, the panto made fantastic use of the rich diversity of the Sangha and its talents. Felicity sang beautifully (and in a spirit of fun), Vimalabandhu hammed up his nerves, and Hannah and Jan Kirkham got a moment in the limelight as the young

Princes. Latin members of the Sangha deserve a special mention for embracing their shameless typecasting as sex-obsessed, food-addicted Verdi devotees (especially Ivan Villamar - Trullio and his cowboy hat).

However, touches such as the rewriting of the big battle as a sing-off and the balletic chorus of ungainly yoga practitioners, helped the audience keep Buddhist context in mind!

Special mention must also go to the 'straight' actors – Mieke Philips as Imogen, David Geasor as Posthumous, and Priyananda as King Cymbelline – who held it all together in the midst of all the madness.

The panto raised an amazing £1,800 for the CBC, supplemented through the efforts of a raffle and those who contributed to 'fun in the foyer' beforehand. Perhaps more importantly, a fantastic time was had by all – leaving my guest asking, somewhat bemusedly, 'So, is that the sort of thing you get up to at meditation class?!'

# Messiaen 101 Festival 2009

## Rainbows and Non-Retrograde Rhythms

In darkest December 2009, with winter snows, Emma Chopourian offered a Festival of talks, discussions, films and concerts over a two week period to celebrate the musical universe of Olivier Messiaen. Some reflections below from two hardy punters who braved the elements and got stuck in to this experience. Emma said, 'It was a treat for me, to offer these treasures and my experiences of being with Messiaen and how he has shaped my musical and spiritual being'.

Guhyaprabha comments: 'A generous Festival of Music was offered by Emma Chopourian over the week leading into Christmas 2009 - Messiaen 101, a suitably palindromic, 'non-retrograde' birthdate number as we were later to discover. Messiaen's hall mark is his very individual cornucopia of colours, textures and rhythms defining his musical universe.

This was a decisive vision bringing the arts and the spiritual dimension alive in our Buddhist context and acoustically acclaimed theatre. Although the theatre's heating rendered it only for the brave to attend, the clear, moon-lit evenings illuminated the snow magically, so that I always left with a sense of wonder. The music, beauty and warmth of mingling afterwards seemed to weave into a tapestry piece informing my late night dreams. The programme was varied, themed and cohesive from start to finish. This well juxtaposed series of events, often twice a day, set a continuity of quality, breadth of media (films, talks, interview, live performance) - a

generosity of spirit both from Emma and the many professional musicians who came out of love of their art, particularly the opportunity to play Messiaen's visionary works.

I appreciated this Festival's inspiration to immerse and stretch myself as a Buddhist exploring these themes - musically-expressed vision, expanding consciousness, intergration expressed so colourfully and evocatively. Often it was a stretch for me to stay in with the unknown. Other times things came together into a new familiarity and I felt deepened.

Three highlights come to mind. The first was the theme of birdsong - signs of opening to the wonder of a more expansive arena. I recall Kevin Hand's smile after talking to the theme of *Why do Birds Sing?*, beaming delight and wonder when he heard his first musical identifications of this in *Des Canyons Aux Etoiles*. A slideshow of Bryce Canyons deepened my experience of colour and texture to music and a moving act from the opera *St François Assise* cinematically broadened my capacity to stay with this material, building up later to a sensitive and commanding performance by Phillip Mead on piano, with a lyrical piano accompaniment of Chopourian and Brenda Dykes poised pure sound playful vigour and precision on flute in *Le Merle Noire*. My second highlight arrived listening to Anne Page, organist, in interview with Emma. It was a small and intimate group discussion, one of the threads being the spiritual significance of offering 'self' in ritual.

The third highlight was Cambridge Circus's exquisite performance of *Quartet Pour La Fin Du Temps*, a demanding piece where every instrument can be singled out. None of them can hide, so to speak. I was struck with each one's exposure.

This was a poignant experience, the audience were riveted (later two players shared with me how exceedingly still and concentrated the audience was) and loving this opportunity to go deeper into their relationship to the music. At the time I was struck by the empathy of player with player, player with theme. The last movement particularly grasped me, for this piece is both excruciating in its origins in a concentration camp and integrative in meaning with impermanence, insubstantiality and dukkha. The piece has the profundity of 'practise' at its best. As a Buddhist, this piece is one I can't turn away from: it holds meaning to me and history in its literal and metaphorical senses. The cello's music was purity itself, bringing together the dark and light. The finale of the solo violin was exquisite, the beauty shattering.'

Helen Arnold reflects: 'The week before Christmas was an unusual time to schedule a festival, busy as we all are at that time. Admittedly, Emma couldn't have predicted the icy conditions that made it such a perilous adventure just to get there. But, these things somehow intensified the experience of being immersed in Messiaen's world for a week - a new experience for me, and a wonderful introduction to his unique soundscape. The festival was so diverse. The film interview with his wife gave us a sense of Messiaen's intensity, his wide interests and his (and her) humour. The birdsong talk *Why do birds sing* by Kevin Hand enabled us to concentrate on the birdsong that so inspired Messiaen (my nine-year-old particularly remembers how Kevin wondered whether bird song, which is mostly about 'sex and violence' was appropriate to a shrine room!). I was very touched by the reading of Messiaen's mother's poems which gave such a vivid sense of the loving and sensitive upbringing from which his genius grew. Anne Page told us how hearing Messiaen had been so influential in her choice to become an organist: she spoke of her increasing perception of the spiritual depth of his compositions. It was fascinating to hear how playing Messiaen's music on his own organ, in his own church, had enhanced her understanding of how to perform these works. I think the highlight for me was the *Quartet Pour La Fin Du Temps*, spellbinding with its myriads of colours and moods: the intensity of the performance was such that it truly felt as if Messiaen was with us, speaking directly through the music.'



## Business, but not as usual

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**Earlier this year Keturaja took over from Vajraketu as managing director at windhorse:evolution, the Buddhist right livelihood business based here in Cambridge. windhorse:evolution employs over 250 people, importing ethically traded giftware for independent gift shops in the UK, as well as having its own chain of 'evolution' gift shops. In this article Keturaja talks about what it has meant to him to take on this new role, his long involvement in the business, and its relationship to the Cambridge Buddhist Centre.**

In the autumn of last year, Vajraketu and Ratnaghosha (another director of the business) suggested that I take over as managing director. This request came as a surprise, even though I had thought about this possibility in the past. I had previously thought that it wasn't something that I wanted to do! Thinking about this request however, I realised that I had changed and maybe now was the right time. On further reflection and discussion with friends, it felt like more of a natural progression and not quite such a big step.

I started working in windhorse:evolution almost 25 years ago, when I came to Cambridge soon after graduating from college in Manchester. I was inspired by the aims of the business: to raise funds to make the Dharma available to others; and also to help communities in the developing world by trading with them in an ethical way. At that time I didn't really understand how work could be a spiritual practice, but I very much enjoyed working with other idealistic people. It felt great to have a meaningful project that I could unreservedly put my youthful energies into.

At that time the business was very small, with less than a dozen of us working in a tiny warehouse at the bottom of Auckland Rd. We all lived in the one community house that we rented on Newmarket Rd. In the early stages of the project, things were quite chaotic. At times we didn't really know what we were doing. There was, however, a great enthusiasm and belief that almost anything was possible! At that time, there was no Cambridge Buddhist Centre, but I remember several of us running meditation and Buddhism classes in the Bath House Community Centre just

off Mill Road. Those were very much pioneering days of bringing the Dharma to the city of Cambridge.

Today, windhorse:evolution has grown to become a medium sized company, employing over 100 people at our head office and warehouse here in Cambridge, with another 150 people in our evolution shops scattered around the UK. It has been wonderful to be involved in the growth of such an enterprise and to work alongside fellow Buddhists. Personally, I have found that each stage of the business's development has stretched me. It has progressively drawn out qualities that I needed to develop in my own spiritual life, like learning to work cooperatively with others. It has also been fascinating to be involved with friends in exploring how to make one's work a spiritual practice. My confidence in this process, guided by the Dharma, has only grown over the years.

Most Buddhists in the UK need to work for a living. Working seven or more hours a day, and with other responsibilities, it can be difficult to squeeze in an hour's meditation, study or reflection. So, if one can make one's work a spiritual practice surely that is of huge advantage in our spiritual lives. I believe that, in almost any kind of occupation, it is possible to use work to develop our mindfulness, patience and kind consideration of others, amongst other qualities. Working with other Buddhists in a business dedicated to encouraging their spiritual growth can, I believe, take that a step further. It creates the opportunity to build a supportive ethos and conditions for that practice, fostering greater awareness of others and ourselves. I have found it interesting that different people engage in the practice of right livelihood in different ways. Also, at different times they will be excited by different approaches: for example, sometimes enthused by the practice of mindfulness, at other times developing their communication skills. At windhorse:evolution this means we need to remain creative and innovative in our approach to the practice of right livelihood. Just because we have given ourselves the label of being a team based right livelihood business does not automatically mean that we are being effective in making our work a spiritual practice! I am keen, as managing director, that we continue to develop our individual and collective practice of right livelihood and communicate our experience to those who are interested.

Over the years, it has been great to see the creation and growth of the Cambridge Buddhist Centre in parallel with the development of windhorse:evolution. The Triratna Buddhist Community in Cambridge has grown in size and diversity from those early days in the Bathhouse! It has certainly made my own work more meaningful to know that the business has been able to support the development of the Centre and what it is able to offer to the people of Cambridge. Ten years ago, the Windhorse Trust (the charitable trust that owns and benefits from the profits of windhorse:evolution), was able to buy the Georgian house and theatre that now houses the Centre. The Trust continues to support the Centre by allowing it to use these premises rent free.

As well as supporting the Centre, the Windhorse Trust has been able to buy ten other properties in Cambridge, including the historic Abbey House, to house residential spiritual communities. These have enabled hundreds of people to explore community living as a context in which to further their spiritual practice. There are currently over 50 men and women living in these communities.

As I am settling into my new job, I am aware of various challenges that face the business, but I couldn't think of a more supportive context in which to take on this practice.

N.B. if you would like to know more about windhorse:evolution and/or would like to visit us please contact [Dharmasiddhi@windhorse.biz](mailto:Dharmasiddhi@windhorse.biz) or contact us on 01223 868600.



# Street Meditation

## Ivan Villamar rejoices in an innovative practice

The first name of this project was 'public meditation', and I think this name communicates something in itself. A public space is somewhere that is not private or personal, somewhere that is not hidden. In my experience of Buddhism, although it is not an evangelical religion, we have become apologetic of what we do and why. I believe, as do many others, that Buddhism and its practices have a lot to offer modern society.

So, that's what I wanted to make more public: the presence of Buddhism in this city, this year, among Westerners. I wanted to communicate that meditation is not only an isolated practice: it's not only something you do in a quiet room in order to relax and benefit yourself. Meditation can take place anywhere, anytime, in the heart of our society. Wherever and whenever it takes place, on a personal and social level it can have a positive effect.

On our first sit in the city centre, we were sat in a circle or semi-circle, facing out to the world: we were there, meditating in public. We experienced more than we expected. We imagined that meditating in a city centre on a busy Saturday morning would be more difficult than in a quiet space. In fact, many found that the opposite was true, that it was easier

to get into a deeper state of meditation and that the interactive side, like giving out fliers was more difficult.

For me, two things in particular really stood out. First, simply being on the street brought to the meditation a variety and richness that we don't usually experience. There were the sounds of people passing, the rumble of traffic and snatches of conversation. We were surrounded by the hustle and bustle of everyday life. We also really valued being able to invite people, in a friendly way, to try out meditation, to show that this is a practice that anyone can take on.

So, for this reason, we changed the name to 'street meditation' and at the next session we arranged ourselves more openly, with empty seats and signs saying 'try it', 'join in' and 'just sit'. Most of us meditated for short sits of 30 minutes, while two or three others took care of the meditating people and gave out flyers and postcards featuring a short breathing exercise and a link to the website that we are building ([www.buddhismtoday.co.uk](http://www.buddhismtoday.co.uk)).

Although some were interested, we found that most people didn't quite know how to respond to what we were doing. Children were more openly curious, asking their parents, 'What are they doing? Are they sleeping?'

Street meditation is just beginning. This is a whole new world to explore and we want to continue. Please, if you want to join us and have this experience, contact us on [info@buddhismtoday.co.uk](mailto:info@buddhismtoday.co.uk)

