

# Around this mandala...

The newsletter of the Triratna Buddhist Centre in Bristol



At one of our midwinter meditation mornings recently, I had a sense of a stream of practice building between us and through the ten days of practice

mornings, and through living our practice each day in our lives through the year. Each of us might dip into the collective part of that stream in different ways at different times, and in so doing we're creating Sangha together.

Through 2011 we've practised together. We've participated in countless classes, courses, study groups, and on two lovely Sangha retreats and the excellent International Urban Retreat. We've celebrated together on festival days, at mitra ceremonies, and my inauguration as Chairwoman. We've grieved together after Manjusvara's death. We've appreciated what we gain from those who formed our Sangha over the last 30 years. We've rejoiced together at Vessantara's recent visit after his three year retreat. We've worked together, cleaning the Centre on Tuesday afternoons, forming teams for classes, and hosting Manjusvara's funeral and an Open Day. We've meditated, drunk tea, studied and danced together. What do you remember being part of?

I hope all this will continue and develop further in 2012. I'd like to see each of us deepen our practice, both as an individual and as part of the Sangha. I'd like to see us sharing more of our lives together in different ways; sharing our possessions & skills, our time and our hearts, helping each other more, in and out of the Centre because we find that rewarding and enjoyable to do. And I'd like to see us dedicating our building more and more to the Dharma, sharing more and more practice together at the Centre, and offering that to more people in Bristol.

Jvalamalini

## WELCOME HOME!

It was a delight to spend time meditating with Vessantara and Vijayamala following their recent return from a 3 year retreat in a remote region of France.



Vesantara



## SANGHA DAY CELEBRATIONS AND MITRA CEREMONIES!

Sangha Day is probably one of my favourite Buddhist Festivals in our Calendar of events. It's a time to get together as a group of practising Buddhists and celebrate our community and our practice together. Coming hot on the heels of the Bristol Sangha's 30th Birthday celebrations, Sangha Day seemed to hold more significance than usual for me this year.

After a morning of meditation, our President (Manjuvajara) gave a talk about resolving conflict between friends in a Buddhist way. This was followed by our usual delicious shared vegetarian lunch and a chance to catch up and chat with other Sangha members. After lunch, Kamalamani led a thought provoking session on Sangha and then we moved onto my personal highlight of the day, the Mitra ceremonies - a chance for us to welcome two more friends into our Sangha.

Having become a mitra myself last year, I am always very moved when attending the Mitra

ceremonies of others and these proved to be no exception. Karunavapi and Khemajoti spoke movingly on behalf of our two new mitras, Liz and Linda, the mitras themselves then read their chosen dharma texts and made the traditional three offerings of a flower, incense and a candle representing impermanence, insubstantiality and enlightenment. This was followed by a chance for current mitras and order members to renew their precepts followed by a three fold puja. The ceremony was attended by Liz's 11 month old twins, Izzy and Isaac who remained composed throughout, despite the loudness of the congratulatory Sadhus!

Finally, other members of the sangha gave cards and gifts to Liz and Linda to celebrate their Mitra Ceremonies and we retired to the main room for more tea and cake.

Clare Swinton



Liz and Linda make their offerings to the shrine during their Sangha Day Mitra ceremonies.



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'The  
Sevenfold  
Puja is the  
act of not a  
single person  
or of a group  
of people,  
but of the  
spiritual  
community'

Sangharakshita





## GETTING TO KNOW KHEMAJOTI

Khemajoti (light or radiance of peace, calm, tranquillity) was ordained in 1997 at Tiratanaloka, the women's retreat centre in S.Wales. She's

been living in Bristol about 8 years having moved here to be nearer to her parents. She's currently living in South Bristol with two other Buddhists and has been working at the Buddhist centre since March.

### What's your favourite Dharma book?

*Well, it would have to be various texts from the Pali canon, such as the Dhammapada, which I come back to again and again. Not sure 'favourite' describes them though - they are very challenging!*

### What's your favourite windhorse book?

*There have been many that I have found helpful along the way such as 'Change Your Mind', 'What is the Dharma?', 'Know Your Mind', 'Wisdom beyond Words', 'Meeting the Buddhas' and many others.*

### What was your first Dharma book?

*It was something by Christmas Humphreys though I can't remember the title - bought from a 2nd hand bookshop in Kathmandu, having been bowled over by the stupa at Swayambunath.*



### What fascinated you into practicing the Dharma?

*The aforementioned encounter with the stupa - completely unexpected - I had just gone to look at it as a tourist and here I am 20+ years later living a Buddhist life in Bristol!*

**What is your favourite image of Enlightenment?** *That's very hard to choose. Different images have 'spoken' to me at different times...from beautiful images of Kwan Yin to rather scary images of Vajrapani. And sometimes I prefer no images - just the blue sky...*

### Who is the living person you most admire?

*Also hard to choose - I don't think there's just one. I am inspired by well known figures such as Aung San Sui Ki but also by many folk in our Order (too many to list here) and all kinds of people one hears or reads about who have overcome great difficulties or who have done some selfless act or who are working for the good of others in different ways.*

### What's your most annoying habit?

*You'd better ask my house and work mates! I'm sure they could list a few!*

### What's your favourite dinner?

*A large plate of steamed veg - really!*

### Have you any regrets?

*No major ones - of course I wish I had acted more skilfully on numerous occasions - but at the time, due to unawareness, I could only do whatever I did. I rejoice that change is possible! Sometimes I wish I had learnt Chinese or Russian when I had the chance but I suppose it's never too late.*

### What was the most significant day in your life?

*Possibly my mitra ceremony in 1989. I'd never been to a mitra ceremony before and nearly chickened out! I'm very glad I didn't - it had a hugely positive effect on me and here I am all these years later.*

## GOOD HUMOURED DEBATE IN CLIFTON



On 8th November, I attended the Bristol Baptist College in Clifton for a question & answer session with their degree students. The 18 students present were studying for a BA Hons in Youth and Community work and practical theology. The panel consisted of me, Rizwan - a Muslim who is part of the Multi-Faith Chaplaincy Team at Bristol University; and Chris - a member of the pastoral council of Bristol Catholic Cathedral.

There were some very interesting questions from the students, covering areas such as rules versus precepts,

intention versus submission, the ethics of abortion, the role of prostration and supplication. As always, when I do Vitarka visits, I decided on one Dharma message that I aim to convey. I chose a message from a talk given by Sangharakshita in Mumbai: "I believe that humanity

is basically one. I believe that it is possible for any human being to communicate with any other human being, to feel for any other human being, to be friends with any other human being. This is what I truly and deeply believe. This belief is part of my own experience. It is part of my life. I cannot live without this belief, and I would rather die than give it up".

The last few words being very strong; one of the students picked up on this and asked if he could interview me on this subject for his degree project. I agreed and invited him over to the Buddhist Centre for the interview.

One student asked Rizwan his views on an incident in 2007, where a British schoolteacher was arrested in Sudan accused of insulting Islam's Prophet, after she allowed her pupils to name a teddy bear Muhammad. Rizwan took a pragmatic approach, after which I asked him what he called his teddy bear!! Rizwan chuckled and one of the students said 'Jesus!' After which there was much laughter and applause!! I felt very encouraged to be part of such a relaxed and open atmosphere where we could share such a joke.

The director of the Bristol Baptist College thanked me after the session for creating such a joyous atmosphere.

Karunavapi



## FACING THE CHALLENGES OF OUR TIMES an evening with the Ecodharma collective

Four of the Eco Dharma collective (Alex, Caspar, Guhyapati and Maitrisara) visited the Centre in early December. The evening was billed as 'an interactive workshop applying the tools and insights of the Dharma to empower and equip us to face the challenges of our times'. Guhyapati introduced the relevance of this theme in the Triratna community and how it's currently being re-visited after Sangharakshita's early emphasis upon 'the new society'. The team wove together information, reflections, teachings, discussion, meditation, images, and humour - inviting, with skill, our exploration of these themes. The evening reminded me of an engaged, relational seven fold puja in capturing moods and eliciting different thoughts and feelings; the joy of human connection through to a familiar dread in the face of local/global challenges. The atmosphere was lively and engaging with 37 people participating. It was great to see some who mightn't otherwise come to a Friends' Night - attracted by engaged Buddhism and taking practice out into the wider world (please come back soon!) We had a precious chance to reflect collectively about where we are as a mandala in terms of our centre's contribution to the power of the Dharma to transform society. It felt very valuable to reflect on what we do contribute, where we fall short and scope for future developments. I found the evening integrating in bringing together themes that are a constant in my everyday work-life into the shrine room at the Bristol Buddhist Centre. I appreciate the team hosting with such skill, care and clarity and wish we could have had more time for the workshop. I feel deep gratitude that in Triratna the Eco Dharma retreat centre is exploring - through action and reflection - the importance of eco and social justice themes in the context of Dharma practice. This will soon be complemented by the Sila Network. I'm off to Eco Dharma for the mid-winter retreat and look forward to being in the mountains - imbibing the spirit of place whilst reflecting on the Brahma Viharas and their relevance to my life and work. For more information about Eco Dharma in the Spanish Pyrenees visit: <http://www.ecodharma.com>

Kamalamani