

Margaret Fergusson and Christine Ironside went to Akashavana in the spring for a three-month ordination retreat in the Spanish mountains. They have returned as Danabadhri (Margaret, right) and Tejini (Christine, centre), having left their old selves and old names behind. They're pictured here with Abhayadevi (Helen Tissington as was, from the Highland sangha). They spoke to GIST about their experience. See insert.



## Goodbye FWBO, hello Triratna Buddhist Community

In early 2010, Sangharakshita wrote to all Order members strongly suggesting that the name of the Order be changed to Triratna Buddhist Order. He also proposed that the FWBO should become the 'Friends of the Triratna Buddhist Order', but accepted the alternative proposal of Triratna Buddhist Community in response to a request from chairs of European Buddhist centres.

Triratna means Three Jewels: the central ideals of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Sangharakshita has always stressed that the Buddhism practised in his movement was about focusing on the core teachings of the tradition – ideals and practices summed up in the Three Jewels. The name also emphasises friendship and community.

The proposal was vigorously debated. Some Order members in the West were sorry to lose the word 'Western' from the name; being known as 'Western Buddhists' was meaningful to them.

However, a majority could see the need for one name

worldwide and so in spring 2010 the name of the Order and movement were changed to Triratna Buddhist Order and Triratna Buddhist Community.

Below are a couple of extracts showing the provenance of the name.

*From The Triratna Story by Vajragupta, p176 (available in the bookshop):*

In April 1967, in a tiny basement room in London, Sangharakshita inaugurated the Triratna Meditation Room and Shrine of the Friends of the Western Sangha.

Forty-three years later, on Wesak (the festival of the Buddha's

Enlightenment) in May 2010, Buddhist centres all over the world marked the change of the name from FWBO to Triratna Buddhist Community.

*From a talk by Sangharakshita:*

'Inside that tiny dimly lit basement shrine – the Triratna Shrine and Meditation Centre as we called it – it was very quiet and very peaceful, especially when we were all meditating.

'And when I look back it's really quite astonishing that we should have done so well in such a small space and with such very limited facilities and so few people.'

## Some sangha members give their reaction to the name change

“I much prefer Triratna Community to Friends of the Western Buddhist Order. FWBO didn’t do justice to the complexity of relationships within the movement – between all members of the sangha, Order Members, mitras, friends, everyone. ‘Community’ has more connotations of inter-connectedness, it’s more relational.”  
*Karen McLaughlin*

“I wish it had been the Three Jewels (in English) rather than the Sanskrit ‘Triratna’. Using ‘ratna’ – people don’t know what it means. We’re meant to be making ourselves more accessible; this is a closing down – a barrier, we’re losing some aspect of ‘western’. I think it can be seen as elitist – difficult for people who are new, and for friends and families of people exploring the Buddhist path here.”  
*Ghillian Russell*

“I like the emphasis on the Three Jewels at the centre, it feels like we’re returning to the origins of the movement. The Triratna Shrine and Meditation Centre was where Bhante started teaching in London in the late 1960s. But I do miss the explicit connection to something ‘western’. I say to people I go to the Glasgow Buddhist Centre; that’s enough. I tell them it was founded by a westerner and it’s rooted in Buddhist tradition.”  
*Vipassini*

“I much prefer Triratna. I want to get away from the dark days of the FWBO, the adverse publicity of the FWBO Files. I like the Three Jewels being at the heart of what we do.”  
*Tom Chapman*

“I’m all in favour. I like the worldwide dimension of the Three Jewels.”  
*Bill Park*

“I don’t really like the name change, it’s confusing. Who are we? What are we? People outside might think it’s a new Buddhist group. I suppose it is in a way; it’s always changing.” *Tejmi*

“I prefer Triratna – it encapsulates what we’re about: Buddha, Dharma, Sangha. The name says we’re worldwide, not confined to the west. It’s also less of a mouthful!”  
*Rosemary Gibbs*



### Pilgrimage Ahoy!

*Left:* the Mahabodhi Temple in Bodhgaya where the Buddha gained Enlightenment

*Below:* Pilgrims on the last GBC pilgrimage in 2007 meditating at Sarnath, where the Buddha first turned the wheel of the Dharma.



## The GBC Pilgrimage

***To the sacred places of India, December-January 2011-12***

We’re getting ready for another pilgrimage to the four sacred places in North India where the Buddha was born, attained Enlightenment, began to teach the Dharma and entered parinirvana.

We may also be heading to the hills to visit Darjeeling and Kalimpong where Sangharakshita lived for many years and Dharpo Rimpoche’s Tibetan school is to be found.

It will be a Triratna Buddhist retreat on wheels. We’ll be practising meditation and puja together and living by the five precepts, making our devotions at the sites, reflecting on the life of the Buddha and supporting each other through the trials of Indian travel and basic shared accommodation.

Speak to Suriyavamsa for more details and let him know if you’re coming.

There will be monthly meetings to prepare for the pilgrimage: the first is on 17 December at 6pm (see Diary Dates).



**New Karma Project Trustees**

*Left to right: Dassini, Helen McConville, Sally Watson, Hilary Barclay, Ann Roberts*

**Karma Project India**

**On 17 October a historic event took place: the first meeting of the Karma Project India**

Set up in 2007 by GBC mitra Ann Roberts and her partner Sanjay Kumar, the Karma project is a self-funding project based in Bodhgaya that helps young people to either remain in, or return to, education.

Ann and Sanjay met on the last GBC pilgrimage and now live in Bodhgaya where they run a guesthouse which they open to visitors in return for dana payment which has helped to maintain and expand the project.

The meeting last month established the project as a charity, bringing together

Indian and British trustees to oversee its activities. The trustees are responsible for ensuring funds are applied correctly. They can also raise funds and receive grants and donations to carry out the work of the charity.

The aim is to expand the original education project, working with 5-18 year olds who have problems funding their education, and to develop the opportunities that started this year in the Empowerment of Women programme.

The latter programme is open to all women in education, irrespective of caste or religion. The project hopes to provide free health advice and a regular clinic, an advocacy service, education advice and funding and mediation service to young women in

villages within a 30km area who are having problems staying in education.

Other projects include building a meditation hall and funding teachers in local schools.

A fundraising night in the centre last month raised almost £800 from the sale of jewellery, cards, clothes and bags made by Indian women taking part in the project. This is a fantastic sum, which will pay the tuition fees, books and uniforms for a year for 15 children and young adults in India.

**Get in touch!**

Email [dmitrasanjay@yahoo.co.in](mailto:dmitrasanjay@yahoo.co.in), request Ann as a Facebook friend or check out the web link at <https://sites.google.com/site/thekarmaprojectindia>

**Keep the Three Jewels Shining**

“I know quite a few people who’ve recently made wills and who’ve found thinking through the issues involved quite uplifting and liberating, not at all morbid or depressing.”

So says Vajragupta, director of the Triratna Development Team. Members of the team are touring UK centres to launch and promote a campaign called Keep the Three Jewels Shining. Vajragupta explains:

“We are giving out a brochure with a ten-step guide to making a will, and also a short DVD. The aim is to encourage people to make a will, and also to encourage them to think about leaving a gift in their will to the Triratna Buddhist Community.

“Making a will is an act of generosity. Firstly, it is generous in that you’re not leaving difficult issues to be sorted out by your loved ones after you’ve died and they are grieving. Secondly, it’s

an act of generosity because in making a will you have to think about how you can make use of what you own after you’ve gone.

“It is an opportunity to give to family, friends, and communities and causes you care about. It’s a chance to think through what really matters to you, and a small way of reflecting on the Buddha’s teaching of impermanence.

“Quite a number of our centres have received gifts in wills in recent years. At the Krakov Centre - our first centre in Poland - a gift has helped pay for translations of Dharma texts. At Taraloka, a surprise gift helped buy badly needed new furniture that the retreat centre hadn’t expected to be able to afford. There are lots of other similar stories of generosity that help keep the Three Jewels shining.”

**Download the short DVDs and ten-step guide to making a will at:**

[www.triratnadevelopment.org/wills](http://www.triratnadevelopment.org/wills)

## Free Buddhist Audio

### Dassini tells a tale of friendship and family

Free Buddhist Audio (FBA) is a free online audio and Dharma text archive; many of you will know it and use it frequently. But did you know that this fantastic resource has strong Scottish links? And, just as individuals are friends with each other, the GBC and FBA are Dharma buddies, too.

Many years ago, a Glasgow mitra named Michael moved to England to work for a tiny charity called Dharmachakra Tapes, an audio archive of Sangharakshita's lectures. He copied and distributed tapes, around 1,000 a year: sales and distribution were slow. Michael's links with Glasgow stayed strong through family and friendships and, before his ordination, Suriyavamsa became his kalyana mitra.\*

In the course of time transformations occurred: Michael became Candradasa (*pictured above right*) and the large but fragile collection of tapes that he worked with became a digitised archive. In an inspired move, this archive went online and became free to all users.\*\* So a collection of disintegrating tapes became a globally accessible and free gift to all listeners, with donations gratefully received. At around this time, Candradasa's sister Maria began coming to the GBC and in time had her mitra ceremony at Dhanakosa. And their brother Damien appeared on the scene too!

By 2009 the digitised archive was reaching an audience of over 200,000 in 180 countries. By this time, Candradasa had moved to the US, but



his friendships in Glasgow remained important. When it became obvious that FBA needed to fundraise, the GBC council gave them a large interest-free loan. It was good to help the project at this stage, before its financial roots got deeper. And instead of giving cash we gave free interest from part of our reserves we didn't need to rely on right at that moment.

The FBA team has grown and blossomed: Candradasa is now one of a network of people working on the project, with volunteers helping out all over the world. More transformation and growth.

Being a Dharma magpie, who loves having access to as many texts and teachings as possible, Suriyavamsa (among others) championed and promoted the FBA resource at our centre. Now the GBC sangha is a heavy user of this treasury, and we all benefit from that. I'm a trustee of Dharmachakra, the charity that oversees FBA, partly because a good

way to honour friendship is to support the work of your friends, but partly because I believe in the project, regardless of personal ties.

So please support their work by using the archive and telling others about it. Donate if you can, so that it stays strong. I like to give FBA a regular donation because it's giving to me and my friends all the time!

\*A kalyana mitra is a friend with whom you've made specific commitments. These commitments are for life; they're the long-term relationship of the Sangha jewel. This is an optional part of ordination training in the Triratna community.

\*\*Giving the Dharma away for free is a practice that's been at the heart of Buddhism since its beginnings. Originally this was done through oral teachings. Later, benefactors would give money that produced free books, so that monasteries and viharas could give away copies of suttas such as the Dhammapada or Bodhicaryavatara. This still happens widely in the east.

## Diary Dates

**Winter Gatherings will be held on Tuesdays from 7 December - 4 January at 7.30pm. There will be meditation, puja and talks by various people. Open to all. Details to follow.**

<b>Tuesday 7 December</b>	<b>Winter gathering, see above</b>
<b>Tuesday 14 December</b>	<b>Winter gathering, see above</b>
<b>Friday 17 December</b>	<b>First pilgrimage meeting, 6pm Food provided, suggested donation £5</b>
<b>Tuesday 21 December</b>	<b>Solstice festival and puja</b>
<b>Tuesday 28 December</b>	<b>Winter gathering, see above</b>
<b>Tuesday 4 January</b>	<b>Cleaning day at the GBC. Help spruce up the centre for the new year! Details to be announced</b>
<b>Tuesday 4 January</b>	<b>Winter gathering, see above</b>
<b>Thursday 13 January</b>	<b>First mitra night of the year with Vajrasattva puja</b>

# Danabhadri means 'she whose happiness comes from generosity'

## *Danabhadri tells The Gist how it feels to be ordained*

"I asked for ordination in 2001, about nine years ago. I'm a family woman, my family mean a lot to me, and so does Buddhism. I chose the Triratna Order because of the lifestyle – you don't need to become a nun, but can practise in as committed a way as a nun would. There's no fracture zone, there are plenty of other married women with children in the Order and in the wider Triratna Community.

"I like Bhante's teachings, about not getting the cultural stuff mixed up with the Dharma, and I think highly of people like Subhuti and Parami, I like their approach. Sometimes I get grumpy – it's a new movement, everything's not sorted – but I far prefer to live with the slightly bumpy stuff than be in an authoritarian movement.

"It is a new movement, it's Buddhism moving into the west. I find that inspiring, and I just live with the raggedy bits round the edges.

"I found the early years of my ordination process quite difficult. The system that exists now didn't exist then. Once the new system came in, where the private preceptor role can be devolved to the local centre, it was much better. You can get a kula of people you know to support you along the way.

"My kula was always very affirming, while having their finger on the button about what I needed to work on. I used to struggle to let people get close to me; my kula were great at working with me on that, so I became more comfortable and open with them. It was also very practical, with ways of helping me to meet what they said I needed to meet. I was really travelling then. From being in stagnant water I felt I moved into a flowing stream.

"I've learned to communicate more deeply and I'm much easier around people on a deeper level. I'm also more confident in my own practice and I've got a good awareness of what my practice is like. I know I won't get it right all the time, but knowing I'm sincerely trying the best, that gives me confidence and motivation to progress – especially in relation to my saddana practice. It's opened a door into another way of approaching the Dharma. I'm happy to work away at that for lifetimes if necessary!

"I'm much more aware I practice within a network of friends, I'm part of a chapter in Glasgow and a

group of women who meet *ad hoc* at Dhanakosa. Within these networks of friendships you feed back to each other and help each other with your practice. I feel supported and affirmed.

"Being at Akashavana was wonderful. It's unpopulated, you don't see another human being who isn't part of the retreat. At night, looking over the landscape, you feel you're in a mythic realm. There are pine trees, cliffs, it's a very elemental landscape – rugged even by Scottish standards. Vultures live on top of the cliff and you're out there doing the four mind turnings – life is uncertain, death can come at any time – and you see the vultures! It certainly helps with meditation practices.

"I was strongly aware of receiving something in a lineage that goes right back to the Buddha. What you get from your private preceptor – it goes from (in my case) Gunasiddhi to Sanghadevi to Bhante and back and back and back to the Buddha.

"It feels very affirming that someone believes you're practising

sufficiently deeply to be ordained. I found the actual ordination a magical experience, especially the private ordination. It's difficult to put into words. You're ordained in a kuti (hut), and it seemed to be surrounded by light, like the kuti wasn't there, it was just me and Gunasiddhi and all this light; it was a very special experience.

"I had a week to hold my name before the public ordination. I loved it, though I didn't know what it meant. I felt very seen. I'm finding my name is part of my practice. Generosity (dana) is a deep trait in me. The bhadri bit (blessed, auspicious, happy) keeps me from feeling unappreciated, it stops the negative nonsense. I haven't had a mental rant since I was ordained!

"I'd arranged to cook for a retreat at Dhanakosa after I got back. I thought Dhanakosa needed me, but as I was driving up the glen I realised I needed Dhanakosa just as much. It's my second home. I was back there, back in the kitchen, getting the pots out.

"It was the first time I was in a place with people who didn't know me before ordination. I was anxious the funny name would be a problem but they called me 'Dhanabadri' and 'hen' alternately. That did me good! That finished my coming back home and dropping anchor. That first experience of people who didn't know my other name, and didn't stand back from me – that was great."

***I was strongly aware of receiving something in a lineage that goes right back to the Buddha.***

## Tejini means 'light or splendour like a piercing flame'

### *Tejini talks to The Gist about her experience of ordination*

"I first asked for ordination in 1994. I felt it could help to develop my practice because I could see it works for other people, I could see the development of insight in the Order and I was attracted to the transcendental aspects. You've got to test that in your own experience.

"It's been a process of getting to a point where I see that the Order is the best vehicle for helping me – and us all – towards a more transcendental experience of life.

"I later withdrew from the ordination process for a couple of years. That was really useful because I found it difficult and stressful and quite painful; it takes over your life. I'm sure it's not like that for everyone, but I always had loads of doubts.

"In a sense what you're asking for you don't know. No one can tell you what it's like to be ordained, you feel your way towards it and either resolve doubts or decide you've got to live with them.

"I withdrew because I got a bit soul-destroyed and felt I wasn't ever going to get ordained. During that period I went on a retreat to each of the other available Buddhist groups. That was really good, I saw the different styles of practice and I saw the communality.

"I think all the different groups have their difficulties and problems and I realised that the friendships and connections I'd built up in the FWBO (now the Triratna Buddhist Community) were really important. In my experience there were no other Buddhist groups that have such a good support system, and such opportunities for friendship.

"I think women in the Triratna Buddhist Community have the same opportunities as men and are treated equally. That doesn't exist in some other groups which are much more traditional, based on the tradition of the culture. I was standing outside the organisation and seeing its strengths. I resolved a lot of the doubts, which gave me more peace of mind.

"Then I had traumatic events in my life and I thought 'What else am I going to do with my life? This is what I want; why am I wasting time?'

It seemed clear and straightforward and I made a huge effort to get my act together.

"What helped me was to have friends who can see what you need to do. Having a kula was very helpful. It's a group of people you meet with regularly who can give a broader perspective on you and come up with constructive ideas of what you can do. And the quality of retreat at Tiratanaloka (the women's ordination training centre) is excellent; the set-up there is really supportive and inspirational.

"Why did I choose this Order? Well, I definitely didn't want to be a nun. The three months at Akashavana taught me I could do the anagarika (celibate) bit no problem, but the reality is that in a monastic Buddhist community it would be unrelenting practice practice practice, and it would be such a challenge to keep this practice alive and fresh and not just a rote habit.

"The three-month ordination retreat was fantastic, we were led so well by Padmasuri. It's a continuous flow of puja, meditation, study, devotional practice. You do that all day and then you get up and do it again, day after day. I had some boredom at first, but then you gradually go deeper and deeper and build up a momentum, which was wonderful.

"I wanted an experience of a long retreat to test myself, see myself in another context and see what I could sustain. But the more solitude I have, the more I want to test it in the real world. Practising in the world is what attracts me.

"I've started a meditation group in my own village in Comrie. I love teaching meditation, it's my ambition, what most interests me. I've supported classes at GBC and gone to loads of meditation retreats to observe how people teach. I want to be involved in expanding the Perthshire sangha, based at Dhanakosa.

"Because I've been involved for such a long time it's clear how much I've changed. I can see changes in myself and that we do have a real potential to change. I'm kinder and more at ease with myself. I feel a lot of gratitude for the conditions I have in my life.

"I feel very privileged to have come into contact with the Dharma and the Triratna Community."

**As soon as my private preceptor (Ratnadhari) said my name, I recognised I was always that name. I love it.**