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## Welcome from Balajit

Just as our snowdrops start to appear from nowhere, comes too Vajraloka's first e-Newsletter. Welcome! We hope this and future issues will be an open space for us to capture and share some of the life and happenings in this enchanting place. Not just from the resident community and visiting teachers, but from you, the people who come on retreat here. Whether it be reflections, poetry, photo's, memories, insights - whatever.

In this issue, amongst other things, we have an update on our finances, details of a future retreat, a poem from Claire, which was written whilst she was on retreat here last summer, and exotic tales from ex-team member kieran.

The plan is for the newsletter to come out each quarter. We are hoping it will evolve and develop in all sorts of ways over the years ahead. If you would like to contribute, please contact me at [r.lew@virgin.net](mailto:r.lew@virgin.net)

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## Back to Beginners' Mind Retreat from Tejananda

'Beginners mind' is very evocative of the freshness, newness and exciting-ness that's there when we first take up meditation and Dharma practice. It's like our response to anything new - except that in meditation, beginner's mind can mean quite profound meditative and even insightful states. This is great as it makes it very clear that meditation practice is worthwhile!

As the term suggests though, 'beginners mind' generally doesn't last - things become routine, we get into 'bad' habits and very sometimes the whole thing can end up feeling like a bit of a drudge or a bore. 'Ups and downs' are integral to meditation practice, as they are to life generally, and ongoing commitment to practice, is vital. However, there are plenty of ways to get out of the doldrums and 'back to beginners' mind' and a retreat is one of them - especially a retreat, like this one, which is specifically devoted to 'refreshing the parts that other retreats do not reach'!



How will we do this? We'll be looking at familiar practices through fresh eyes - approaching them *as if* meditation is new to us. We'll do this through workshops, pithy input from [myself](#) and the Vajraloka team, led meditations and discussions, both group and individual. We'll also be getting a feel for the whole of our system of practice *in* practice. Above all, we'll be connecting 'meditation' with 'wisdom' or Dharma, quite explicitly - engaging with the Buddha's core description of his teaching as 'duhkha and the cessation of dukkha' and opening to what this could mean, in our own lives.

The retreat will take place from Saturday 18th - Tuesday 28th July and is just open to Men.

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## **Our Finances** from Rijumitra

People often ask when they come on retreat how we are doing financially as they have heard that we have been having our ups and downs over the last few years. I am in the process of preparing the accounts for 2008 and can say that we had a shortfall of around £1,000. Our income for the year was almost exactly £65,000 not much more than the combined gross income of two teachers living together. With this we kept the place running and supported the team.

The shortfall was better than we had feared and considerably better than the previous year but it was still a shortfall. During 2008 we continued spending money on fittings and on doing some much needed work to the gable ends of the shrine room and the dining room.

We averaged somewhere around 10 retreatants per retreat night, we can take up to 21. We reckon that for long term security we need this average to rise to about 13. So as well as doing work to improve our facilities we are also doing our best to get the message across that Vajraloka is a great place to come on retreat. This newsletter is an example of that effort.

In terms of what people can do to help us, one is come on retreat here and the other is to tell others about the place. I think that particularly newer people do not know a lot about the Vajraloka so it really helps us if people who have been on retreat here tell others about their positive time here. For further info contact [rijumitra@gmail.com](mailto:rijumitra@gmail.com)



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## **Life after Vajraloka** from Kieran

Leaving Vajraloka was never going to be easy. After more than six years in the beautiful Alwen valley, I knew it was time to move on but was unsure what my next step would be. I had been practising yoga for a number of years but was not at all sure that I wanted to become a teacher and try to make a living of it. But a chance request from Appicha for me to lead yoga on a retreat at Vajraloka showed me that just maybe I could have a future in teaching.

When the Vajraloka retreat programme allowed it, I had been visiting my girlfriend, Alessandra, who was posted to Nouakchott in Mauritania (W. Africa) two years previously and I had started to teach yoga to friends of hers on an informal basis. Just for fun at first but this soon led me to realise that there was a quite a demand for yoga amongst the expats out in these desert lands of Mauritania.

Now Nouakchott itself is a largely unattractive and very dusty African city with few amenities and little by way of diversion. It has, however, proved to be an excellent place to start my yoga school [DesertYoga](#). Ale and I live in a large house that has a room big enough to teach yoga to twelve or so people and even has a huge flat roof which can fit even more; though it comes complete with a tree full of very large fruit bats who seem to enjoy nothing more than diving and swooping among us yogis of an evening.



I teach around ten classes a week which keeps me more than busy and am planning to do some yoga weekends out in a camp in the dunes...this should be fantastic! The dunes are a place of great wonder and possess an atmosphere of deep intensity and calm and are the perfect place for yoga retreats or indeed any sort of contemplative practice.

Well, I have only been here for a few months but am already enjoying myself and loving being a yoga teacher. And next July, I shall be returning to Vajraloka to teach a yoga and meditation retreat with Tejananda. This promises to be a fantastic opportunity to practice yoga within a context of silence and intensive meditation and I am really looking forward to it. Some experience of both yoga and meditation is needed but you do not need to be an expert in either. Please feel free to contact either myself or Tejananda if you have any queries. And I promise to bring with me a little bit of that desert wonder and magic!

So, I bid a fond farewell to Vajraloka. It has proved to be a wonderful and crucial part of my life and has given me the insight and maturity to take this next phase of my life with confidence. Vajraloka has always been a place of refuge for me and feels as much a home as any other part of the world and I feel honoured to have had the opportunity to be a part of it for so long. I strongly encourage all of you to take advantage of the calm beauty and great conditions that it offers for practice.

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## Whats New from balajit

In many ways i think our 2009 programme keeps the best of what we traditionally offer at Vajraloka, as well

as introducing some exciting new ventures. Amongst the retreats tailored to help us enjoy and deepen our understanding of the basic practices of the FWBO, will be the new [Going Deeper](#) and [Weekend Taster](#) retreats. Which will be led by members of the resident community here. This year will also see our first retreat led by the very popular and experienced Smrtiratna, from the [Dhanakosa](#) retreat centre in Scotland, called [Stilling and Seeing Through](#). We will also be treading new ground in offering a Yoga and Meditation retreat - as kieran refers to above. Towards the end of the year in December, Tejananda will link up with [Dharmadipa](#) from [Padmaloka](#), and explore [Integration to Spiritual Rebirth](#).

With Kieran heading off to new pastures, Ian Barker has now joined us a new team member. As well as helping with the general running of Vajraloka, Ian's main role is to cook for retreats. He has joined a community which has now been together for over three years. We have also been embracing the digital age! For photos of Vajraloka, you can view a diverse and colourful collection either through the gallery on our [website](#) or through our new [flickr](#) site. Our plan is to update these regularly. We also hope to soon be offering through our website, an on-line payment system for our events and a selection of talks.



People who have visited in the last few months may have noticed that we have upgraded the three bedrooms by the shrinerroom - replacing old carpets and furniture and decorating. Also, in response to comments from retreatants, we have now replaced all of our old mattresses. Planning is currently underway for making a range of improvements to the dining room this spring.

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## The Places In Between from Rijumitra

This short piece is prompted by an experience I had recently travelling on a bus when visiting my mother. The bus had stopped at traffic lights and I was looking out of the window and momentarily I recognised that everything is interconnected and that it is impossible for it not to be, at the same time I realised that it was my likes and dislikes that stopped me seeing this all the time. After a moment the bus started up and I carried on as usual.



This recognition was interesting but it also got me thinking how important the places in between can be. There is something about a short bus journey I like, its as though I let go a bit. I am in between who I started the journey as and who I will be at the end of the journey. It's a bit of a rest and in that point of rest some interesting things can arise. I used to get this feeling quite a bit when I was involved in the Centre in Leeds and travelling in on the bus from the Community to do a class. My life was quite frenetic and I could find myself in an anxious state yet when I sat down on the bus, I found I could let go and I'd become more aware and begin to see the humanity of the people around me and I wouldn't be so much identified with my own pre-occupations.

So its worth keeping an eye out for where those places in between exist in one's life.

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## Shrineroom Appeal



After many years of use, it now seems that our shineroom gear needs replacing. With spilled contents, frayed edges and fading colours, one by one, they are falling prey to impermanence!

We would like to buy a whole new set of mats, blankets, and cushions. Into the bargain, if possible, we would also like some new shrine cloths and tibetan style puja instruments, to add more colour to our evening rituals.

To do this we need help! An estimated £2500 to do the job. If you would like to help us out, you could send us money directly through the internet on our fund raising site -<http://www.justgiving.com/shrineroomappeal> where any Gift Aid element is automatically added Alternatively, you could pop us a cheque in the post.

To use the much stated fund raising mantra : *'Every little bit helps!'*

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## Open Awareness

from Claire Binnion

One moment, a flicker of joy  
As everything opens into everything else.  
The space of experience bursts, into infinity  
Where there is no sadness,  
Not even bliss exists, though I feel it.  
Inside what the mind knows  
The very fabric of being is transcended  
by nothing.  
Relaxed by knowing, nothing can go wrong in  
this stillness.  
Sitting, for hours  
Watching the ebbs and flows of everything  
sensed  
Then, forgetting to sense  
And exploring the past instead,  
Or creating a future of choices,  
to dull the voices of fear  
Who call out from uncertain corners,  
Drifting gracelessly past the unknown  
And taunting it to reveal itself.  
Only, to be uplifted by the spontaneous  
embrace  
Of metta.  
She dances through my heart  
but fades as I call her.



Though I know she is inside the clarity of  
pain.  
She is even inside a bird flying in the sky that  
Ceases to be itself.  
I try to watch something and not  
understand.  
I try to ignore its story.  
But with attention alert, I cannot let it go.  
Until, I remember to relax. Until I hear  
nothing but that sound, again and again.  
Then, wandering through my heart,  
Through all the sad places,  
The places she forgets to love  
For the sake of yearning to make it different,  
She turns away for a moment  
Toward the shelter of familiar views,  
Though like a pair of wrong sized shoes  
The fit is awkward.  
But then,  
Once again she finds home within that space  
Devoid of conception,  
Free from minds construction  
And existing only as it is.  
She discovers a flash of insight.  
One moment, a flicker of reality,  
No longer reluctant,  
But inspired by the vivid embrace of life

The elusive mistress, I desire.  
With faith that recognition of the nameless  
Will never end, I know,  
As soon as I know myself I will know where I am,  
Because I can't be found. I need not search, for  
she isn't here,  
Or there.

As it flows through a mind,  
Into emptiness.

**NEXT Vajraloka e-Newsletter Summer 09**  
**(Special 30th Anniversary edition!)**



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