In addition to our usual range of themes, the Vajraloka team are excited about two new retreats we’re offering in 2014.

In November, we’ll be having Vajraloka’s first ‘Total Immersion’ retreat. On this three week retreat, we’ll be plunging deeply into the Triratna system of practice, creating a strong sense of community in a context of space and silence. A great opportunity to ‘go deeper’ with all aspects of our Dharma practice.

And in May, we’re delighted to be welcoming Dhammarati and Kamalashila to the team for our first Order retreat specifically for private preceptors. The theme is ‘mindfulness and spiritual death’, allowing a deep experiential exploration of these areas which are integral to an effective practice.

A familiar retreat, Formless Meditation, is getting a new title to better reflect how Tejananda’s approach to this theme has been evolving over recent years – so look out for ‘Simply Being – and the ‘Mandala of Uselessness’! Bodhananda will also lead a new one week retreat approaching a similar theme from the perspective of ‘Opening to the Nature of the Mind’.

Although many of our retreats are for both sexes, we offer a full range of retreats for men. These explore the foundations of all the main areas of our system of practice and, although open to all men, are especially suited to those who have asked for ordination, or are considering this step.

Looking forward to seeing you here in 2014!

The Vajraloka team
Men’s Retreats
For many of us, our journey of exploring Buddhism starts with meditation. Through regular practice we develop calm and clarity of mind and a greater depth of awareness and sensitivity for ourselves, others and the world around us.

There are times when this unfolding development seems to know no bounds and feels unlimited, and this can greatly inspire us. However, there can be periods when it feels as if our practise has come to a grinding halt. Meditation seems like very hard work and we begin to lose touch with what inspired us to practice in the first place.

You are not alone in this kind of experience! It can be that we’ve become over-attached to particular approaches to meditation, losing the sense of creativity. At Vajraloka we teach fresh approaches employing a wider range of colours from our palette in an atmosphere of friendly support and encouragement.

Come and rediscover your inspiration for meditation in the friendly company of the Vajraloka team in our beautiful and tranquil surroundings. Learn to paint with new styles and colours!
The Bahiya Sutta is famous for the Buddha’s advice to Bahiya ‘In the seen there is just that which is seen’. But there is much more to it – it is a story that can illuminate our own meditative path.

The first part of the retreat will have a strong emphasis on integration and positive emotion, cultivating clarity, metta and stability of mind as we reflect on Bahiya’s decision to seek out the Buddha. We will consider Bahiya’s own questioning of ‘where he was’ spiritually, his decision to go forth from his home to seek out the truth, the Buddha’s teaching to him and finally his death.

On this basis, the second part will introduce elements of ‘spiritual death’ or insight meditation as we consider the Buddha’s teaching to Bahiya and Bahiya’s own awakening.

As the Metta Sutta, the Song of Loving-kindness, says:

*When standing, walking, sitting, lying down,*
*Let one establish well this mindfulness in loving-kindness,*
*This, it is said, is the divine abode.*

The four brahmaviharas are considered in Buddhism to be the highest, most refined human emotions. They are not just feelings or emotions that occasionally arise, but ones that we can live in and live by all the time. The four brahmavihara meditation practices are loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity. They can be understood as four related qualities or perhaps better, as four different ways the spiritually mature person relates to others according to their situation.

The Buddha taught that practising these four qualities leads to the ‘liberation of the heart which is love.’ On this retreat carefully guided meditations in all four practices will be introduced in a relaxed and supportive environment.
Meditating with Confidence
Led by Appicha
24 – 31 October
£280/252

‘Not knowing how close the truth is we seek it far away, what a pity!’
Hakuin

Many of us have developed an over-idealised view of meditation that leaves us feeling frustrated or disempowered. At Vajraloka we feel these views can be seen through in an atmosphere of trust, warmth, humour and sensitive help. Our teaching is based on both Buddhist tradition and the needs of today’s meditators balancing complex needs of family, work and spiritual practice.

Come and rediscover the ability to trust your own unfolding experience and the confidence or insight (spiritual death/rebirth) that comes from seeing into your true nature. Let a little light and laughter into your heart!

On this retreat we’ll follow the system of practice from integration to spiritual rebirth through a fresh approach to shamatha/ vipashyana practice. There will be the freedom to ask ‘difficult questions’ about the practices and allow us to make them ‘our own’ as we discover our unique relationship to meditation.
In Buddhism much importance is placed upon breaking the first three of the ten fetters; attachment to a fixed self-view, lack of clarity about the nature of things and attachment to ‘spiritual practices’ as ends in themselves.

During the retreat we will be looking at ways of clarifying the nature of our experience and through that see more clearly what underlies self-view and what holds us back from the full implications of the Dharma.

All this will be explored through our system of practice, highlighting the Sallatha Sutta in which the Buddha describes how the conceptual mind adds on to immediate experience and how this adding on causes us suffering.

The practice of mindfulness is central to Buddhist meditation. It opens our hearts and minds, liberating us from unnecessary suffering. Sometimes however, we resolve to sit and meditate but it seems our suffering is increasing…

We can approach this creatively by bringing kindly, patient and persistent awareness to the whole of our experience.

As we open to our breathing body we can come into a wholesome relationship with all that arises through our senses. We’ll follow the system of meditation from integration to spiritual rebirth to illuminate the Satipatthana Sutta.

We will meditate and reflect on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. Experiencing our own bodily sensations, feelings, emotions and content of mind we aim to directly experience insight into the true nature of Mind, the liberating truth of the Dharma.
Emptiness and the Heart Sutra
Led by Tejananda
23 May – 1 June
£360/324

‘All things are by nature void – they are not born or destroyed’

Buddhist practice is aimed at awakening fully to the real nature of things. Yet, according to the Heart Sutra, there is no awakening and no ‘things’ to have a real nature in the first place! As such paradox suggests, words and concepts have their limitations as well as their uses.

These are issues that we will explore on this retreat – not through study but by letting the ‘monkey mind’ quieten somewhat and then reflecting on the paradoxes of the Heart Sutra’s teaching on the emptiness of all phenomena. And we’ll see that this is always and only pointing us back to the beauty and simplicity of direct experience, here and now.

There will be short practical introductions to the various sections of the Heart Sutra, and both reflective meditations on the meaning of the sutra, as well as recitations of the sutra itself.

Heroic Spirits
Led by Appicha
6 – 15 June
£360/324

The Ratnagunasamchayagatha declares, “Call forth as much as you can of love, of respect and of faith! Remove the obstructing defilements and clear away all your taints! Listen to the Perfect Wisdom of the gentle Buddhas, taught for the weal of the world, for heroic spirits intended!”

As our bodies and minds settle into their natural relaxed and receptive state (shamatha), by reflecting on liberating dharmic principles (vipashyana) we connect with the confidence beyond our confused thoughts or concepts: the liberating truth at the heart of the Perfection of Wisdom.

On this retreat we heroic spirits, following our system of practice from integration, positive emotion, spiritual death and rebirth, will connect to the confident open dimension at the heart of our being.

The Heart Sutra is the best known of the Perfection of Wisdom sutras and asks us to open to that which is beyond conceptual thought; “Form is only emptiness, emptiness only form”.

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'You don’t have to justify your existence by doing things which are useful'
Sangharakshita

This retreat started as ‘just sitting’, morphed into ‘pure awareness,’ then ‘formless meditation’. So why yet another change? ‘Simply being’ is a quality of receptivity that can be recognised in the activities of our life, not just in formal meditation. The retreat is about recognising and exploring this. How do we go about it? Well, probably the most enjoyable way is by discovering our fundamental uselessness!

We’re very attached to the notion that our lives ‘should’ be useful, purposeful and meaningful. Yet ultimately these are just figments of the human mind. On one level these notions are fine – they are part of what defines us as human beings rather than just your average monkey. But our deep emotional beliefs about who we are and what we ‘ought’ to be cause trouble – duhkha, suffering, pain, stress.

The ‘mandala of uselessness’ is simply being: being what we really are, inseparable from nature itself which is undivided and ungraspable. It’s also pointed to by the five jnanas or ‘undivided-awarenesses’ which make up the dharmadhatu-mandala – a useful ‘map’ which we will be exploring in our immediate experience. And it all points us back to ‘just this’ – what is here already, unnoticed: simply being.

(See also 14 – 26 February, ‘Simply Being and the mandala of uselessness’ for Order members)
This retreat will focus on the sixteen ‘contemplations’ of the Buddha’s ‘Discourse on awareness of the in-and-out breath’ (Anapanasati Sutta). In these, the breath is used as a vehicle for awareness of the four foundations (body, feeling-tone, mental states and mental objects) in the cultivation of both calm (shamatha) and penetrating insight (vipashyana).

This retreat will appeal to anyone who would like to explore and develop the possibilities of the mindfulness of breathing practice. Prakasha has been leading retreats for many years and is well known in the Triratna Community for his clear and inspiring approach.
Summer Retreat with weekend option
Led by the Vajraloka team
22 – 25 August (Bank Holiday weekend)
£120/108
22 – 29 August (week)
£280/252

If you’re relatively new to meditation and retreats, our long weekends are an excellent way of getting a taste of Vajraloka and its beautiful and supportive conditions. Through teaching and workshops we will explore how to enjoy and deepen the main Triratna community practices – mindfulness of breathing and metta bhavana – together with just sitting and reflection on the Dharma. There will be plenty of opportunity for discussion and chats with members of the team as well as silent practice – a valuable feature of all our retreats at Vajraloka.

This popular weekend retreat includes the option of staying on for a full week, to make the most of Vajraloka’s ideal conditions.
‘The world of appearances all comes back to the mind. The mind itself is by nature awareness, beyond the range of conceptual recognition’
Milarepa

What is mind? Where is it? Is the mind just our thoughts? And what is awareness?
If, as Milarepa suggests, ‘the world of appearances all comes back to the mind’, and the mind is beyond conceptual recognition, how can we know what it is?

This retreat will explore these questions – by opening up to the nature of the mind in our direct experience. We’ll be combining just sitting with simple and subtle ways of opening to ‘just what is’ in our experience, including the surprising depths of body awareness. By probing some of our usual assumptions about space, time, thought and ‘self’, our hearts and minds may open to the unsuspected potential of ‘ordinary awareness’.

The retreat will include clear practical guidance, including an outline of the place of ‘spiritual receptivity’ and ‘just sitting’ within the Triratna Community system of practice.
The retreat will focus on the four brahmaviharas or ‘divine abodes’ – love, compassion, joy and equanimity – in the context of the cultivation of the bodhicitta (the awakening heart), and the tonglen or ‘giving and receiving’ practice. Bodhicitta could be described as both the heart-response of wisdom to the suffering of living beings everywhere and the urge to realise Buddhahood for the benefit of all.

The divine abodes are also known as the ‘illimitables,’ as their remit is universal – all living beings without exception. The practices that we’ll explore on this retreat are all ways of opening our hearts and responding to the joys and sufferings of living beings – opening to the inseparable wisdom and compassion of bodhicitta itself.
Total Immersion Retreat
Led by Tejananda and the Vajraloka team
8 – 29 November
£735/672 *

This will be Vajraloka’s first ever three-week ‘Total Immersion’ retreat. Total immersion implies plunging into ‘life as practice’ – not only in sitting meditation, but bringing full awareness to all our activities. This fosters the three trainings of ethics, meditation and wisdom. Ethical sensitivity and kindness in our relations with the community of practitioners on the retreat, and in relation to our whole environment; meditation in and out of the shrine room – meditation as life. And wisdom in the orientations to spiritual death – seeing into the way things really are – which we will introduce as the retreat goes on.

As on all Vajraloka retreats, we’ll be spending much of the time in silence, which supports the inner stillness and the deepening of our practice. At the same time, there will be input from the team (as well input-free periods to pursue our own practice direction), group sessions and, of course, one to one reviews, ensuring that the retreat unfolds in a way that is appropriate to each individual’s particular needs and directions.

* Based on special reduced nightly rate of £35 full, £32 concession
The Buddha taught that all phenomena have three ‘marks’: they are all impermanent, unsatisfactory and insubstantial. Seeing these fundamental truths directly can dramatically change the way we relate to ourselves, others and the world.

Drawing on the practices of mindfulness of breathing, metta bhavana, just sitting and mindfulness of the four postures – sitting, walking, standing, lying down – we will seek to cultivate positive, inquisitive states of mind.

Through experiential workshop sessions, we will open directly to the three marks in our moment to moment experience. Each mark or gateway not only opens into others, but also supports the arising of the bodhicitta, the heart-response of wisdom to the suffering of living beings and the urge to realise Buddhahood for the benefit of all.
Simply Being
and the 'mandala of uselessness'
Led by Tejananda
14 – 26 February
£480/432

‘You don’t have to justify your existence by doing things which are useful’
Sangharakshita

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meditation’. So why yet another change? ‘Simply being’ is a quality of receptivity
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points us back to ‘just this’ – what is here already, unnoticed: simply being.

The Path of Total Integration
from sunyata to spiritual renaissance
in the mandala of sadhana practice
Led by Kamalashila
11 – 23 April
£480/432

Sadhana combines all aspects of the system of meditation into one and connects
with the initiation given at ordination. It is a powerful and largely non-rational
means of forging an ongoing link with the energy of awakening, the Dhamma
Niyama. This retreat will focus on sadhana as the expression and culmination of
the whole system of practice.

Each day we will explore the relationship of sadhana to the principles and expressions
of our entire mandala of practices. For sadhana to work its magic, it needs to arise
out of the clarity of mindfulness, the warm heart of metta and bodhicitta aspiration,
and reflection on shunyata.

Our system of practice may seem quite complex to begin with. Deepening our
practice is a matter of genuinely making it our own. The art of sadhana boils it
all down to complete simplicity, sadhana itself dissolving into the pure spiritual
receptivity of 'no more learning', the path of no-path.
Private Preceptors’ Retreat: Mindfulness and Spiritual Death
For private preceptors of the Triratna Buddhist Order
Led by Tejananda with Dhammarati, Kamalashila and members of the Vajraloka team
9 – 18 May
£360/324

Mentoring in meditation and Dharma practice is a prominent feature of precepting in the Triratna Buddhist Order. The aim of this retreat is to support private preceptors in this important responsibility by fostering a basis for deepening our own practice and direct penetration of Dharma truths.

The retreat will draw on our whole system of practice, but the main emphasis will be on the cultivation of mindfulness of the four foundations – largely through anapanasati – and immediate experiential exploration of the three lakshanas in body, feelings, mind and phenomena.

In addition to collective teaching, the leaders, together with experienced members of the Vajraloka team, will offer the opportunity for longer than usual one to one reviews of participants’ meditation and Dharma practice.
About Vajraloka

A cluster of traditional Welsh stone farm buildings with attractive gardens, Vajraloka is perched on a hillside in a quiet and lovely valley. Below us runs the River Alwen, which flows from nearby Glyn Myfyr – in Welsh, ‘The Vale of Meditation’. Craggy hillsides streams, woods and meadows surround us, while from a little higher up, the dramatic mountains of Snowdonia can be glimpsed.

Vajraloka has been offering Buddhist meditation retreats now for over thirty years, its location and the facilities that have been developed here support the deepening of practice. Many comment on the atmosphere of the shrine room, redolent of the thousands of hours of meditation practice that have taken place here. Our accommodation is simple, warm and comfortable. We have a mix of single and shared bedrooms. In the dining room, our cooks serve up fine nutritious vegan food – which draws on a range of protein sources. When feasible, our food and drinks come from organic, fairtrade sources.

Basics of being on retreat

Whilst there are many variables to our retreats, including leaders, theme and the length, there are some core ingredients that apply across our whole programme of events.

Our retreats start with dinner on the first night at 6.45 p.m. To give yourself time to settle in, please try to arrive between 4 – 6 p.m. Whatever the theme, our retreats are mostly in silence, which supports our practice of discovering ‘inner silence’, letting the mind quieten. At the start of retreats, though, we always allow time for people to talk and get to know each other. Also during the silent period, we offer daily practice reviews. In these you can talk through what is arising in your practice with a member of the retreat teaching team.
Whilst our retreats each have their own programme, a typical day is listed below, to give you a flavour of what to expect:

**Meditation 7.00 & 8.00**
**Breakfast 9.00**
**Meditation / teaching 10.30**
**Lunch 1.00**
**Working meditation 3.00**
**Meditation / teaching 4.30**
**Dinner 6.00**
**Practice reviews**
**Meditation & puja 7.45**

On the final day, our retreats finish around 9.30 a.m. (10.30 on a Sunday) so there is normally plenty of time to make your journey home.

**New to Buddhism and meditation?**

A couple of our retreats are suitable for those with little or no experience of Buddhism and meditation. We have given these retreats a D category on the retreat calendar. On such retreats, we will provide introductory tuition and support on the basic meditation practices of the Triratna Community – namely the mindfulness of breathing and the metta bhavana. Although Vajraloka is a Buddhist retreat centre, you do not have to consider yourself a Buddhist to come on our retreats.
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<tr>
<td>26/09 – 03/10</td>
<td>Opening to Nature of Mind</td>
<td>7 nights</td>
<td>MIXED B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/10 – 19/10</td>
<td>Awakening Heart &amp; Divine Abodes</td>
<td>9 nights</td>
<td>MIXED B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24/10 – 31/10</td>
<td>Meditating with Confidence</td>
<td>7 nights</td>
<td>MEN C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08/11 – 29/11</td>
<td>Total Immersion</td>
<td>21 nights</td>
<td>MIXED B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/12 – 21/12</td>
<td>Gateways to Liberation</td>
<td>9 nights</td>
<td>MIXED B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27/12 – 03/01</td>
<td>Practice Retreat</td>
<td>7 nights</td>
<td>MEN B</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A - Order members only  
B - Minimum 3 years meditation experience  
C - Experience of main Triratna practices  
D - Newcomers – no experience required
BOOKING A RETREAT

The prices for our retreats are based on a full nightly rate and a concessionary rate (for students, unwaged and Triratna Buddhist centre/business workers on ‘support’ rates). Further reductions may be possible – please contact us.

If you would like to book, you can pay the full balance of the retreat through our website.

Please note that we cannot accept deposits through the online booking system.

Alternatively, you can send a cheque (made payable to ‘FWBO Corwen’), accompanied by the booking form, which can be printed from our website.

If you wish to book by paying a deposit, please send a £70 cheque (to ‘FWBO Corwen’). This is non-refundable and non-transferable. This deposit will hold your provisional place until six weeks before the retreat starts, before which date please send the full balance. (Not doing so may lose you your place on the retreat).

If booking within the six-week period, you will need to send, or pay via the website, the full amount.

As some of our accommodation is in shared bedrooms, we need to know if you snore or have any special requirements. Single rooms can be requested for health or related reasons, but cannot be guaranteed. It is also essential that we know whether you have mental or physical health issues, or if you are on any serious medication. Most special diets for medical reasons can be catered for, but please talk with us about this beforehand (at least 10 days before the start of the retreat).
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