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london
buddhist
centre

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Chairman's Report

This year saw the deaths of two LBC Order Members.

The year began with the sadness and shock of Mahananda's death. He died on April 2nd and he leaves a big hole both in the life of the LBC Mandala and more personally in the lives of so many people who regarded him as a friend. His funeral was both joyous and moving - a celebration of his life and an acknowledgment of our loss. It was made still more poignant by being the first public event to take place in our newly refurbished and enlarged Centre.

Then on December 9th Aryamitra died. Aryamitra had contributed to the life of the Order and Movement for over three decades and in many ways. Prior to being at the LBC, where he taught a lunchtime class for many years, he was based at Padmaloka working with the men's Ordination Team. Amongst many other things he did for the Movement, he'll be remembered for setting up the Leeds Buddhist Centre.

At our Wesak Day Celebrations, Subhuti, the LBC's President conducted the ceremony at which Paramabandhu handed on the Chairmanship to myself, and I handed on the Men's Mitra Convenor's role to Jayaka. I want to take the opportunity to thank Paramabandhu for steering the LBC so ably for 6 years - during which time we further developed Vajrasana, completed the largest building project at the LBC since the Centre opened, and started a whole new set of outreach activities that became the Breathing Space project. I am also very pleased that Jayaka has taken on Mitra Convening - and I know that the Men's Mitra Sangha has benefited from his enthusiasm and commitment to spreading the Dharma. This year we welcomed 8 new Order Members: Aryadhara (who currently lives in Cambridge but used to be at the LBC), Jayakara, Manjusiha, Padmagita, Saddhasura, Sanghasiha, Saravantu and Satyadaya. Many congratulations to them!

I am also delighted that Subhuti began to be more actively involved in the LBC after an absence of some years. He visited the Centre for a week in May and again in September. During both visits he did a substantial amount of teaching as well as meeting with individuals - particularly members of the Council. He is coming again for a week from 6th April.

Unfortunately the economic downturn continued to affect our businesses and this (combined with other factors) led to the closure of both Friends Organic and the Wild Cherry. Both businesses have served the community for over three decades and there was a great deal of effort on the part of the teams and members of the Council to turn them around. However in the end we could not afford to keep them going at a loss and it was with great regret that we decided to close. Also I'm sorry to say that due to not having enough Buddhist staff members, our Evolution shop, though still profitable for Windhorse, is no longer an LBC team-based right-livelihood business. I am however very pleased to see the opening of Lama's Pyjamas and also pleased that there is a good deal of interest in a new venture in the Cherry premises. The Council are in the process of reviewing the business proposals that have been submitted for this. I look forward to a new project starting there.

Jnanavaca

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Treasurer's Report

LBC income in 2009 is £579,000. The largest proportion of this is rental income from property. The LBC owns residential properties in Roman Road and Approach Road which house around fifty tenants in three men's and three women's communities.

The LBC also owns commercial property in Roman Road and Globe Road. They were rented to Friends Organic health food store and the Wild Cherry restaurant which unfortunately had to close in 2009 and early 2010. However, the LBC has now opened Lama's Pyjamas charity shop in Roman Road and is looking at options in Globe Road to maintain revenue from these properties.

The LBC also inherited residential property in King Henry's Road from the generous bequest of Mahananda which re-enlarges the LBC's property portfolio after selling properties in Victoria Park Road and Lauriston Road to fund the building project last year. The LBC also owns its retreat centre Vajrasana.

The LBC's property income provides a relatively stable financial footing for the LBC's main activities: running courses, classes and retreats. Other sources of income include the charity shops; donations from generous individuals and organisations; income from its retreat centre Vajrasana; and income and grants for Breathing Space.

LBC expenses in 2009 are £591,000. One of the main on-going expenses is support for the LBC's employees. There are currently eighteen full-time people employed by the LBC doing various roles in the office, reception, bookshop, charity shops and Vajrasana retreat centre. The LBC does not pay traditional wages or salaries but instead supports people according to their individual needs and circumstances.

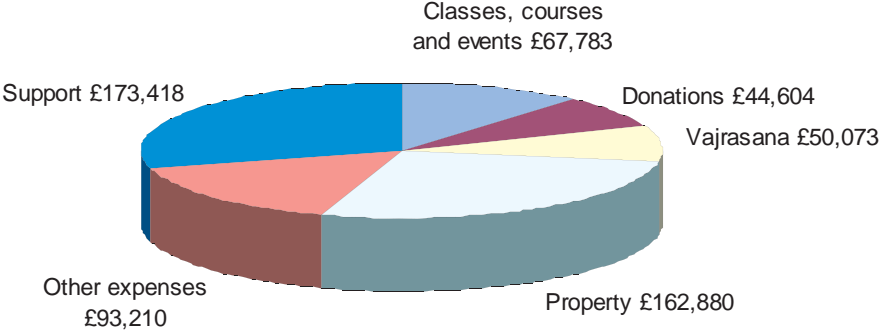
The other main expense is on property which includes maintenance on all the properties mentioned under income; capital and interest re-payments on loans and mortgages; and all the utilities. There are also expenses incurred related to running classes, courses and events which include everything from tea and biscuits to publicity to hiring other venues.

Then there are all the expenses of running the retreat centre Vajrasana which includes items from food and utilities to the septic tank to looking after and maintaining the buildings, pond and garden. There are also other expenses which include everything from auditor's fees to training and staff retreats to the LBC car expenses.

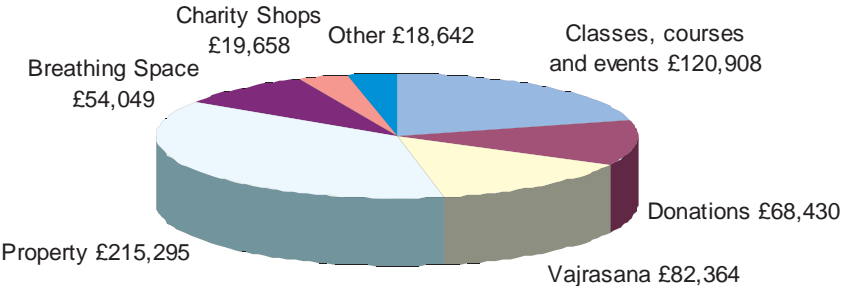
Finally the LBC makes donations to individuals and organisations including centralised Buddhist projects in the UK and India.

Adam Berrisford

LBC expenses in 2009



LBC income in 2009



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Secretary's Report

The first event in the new LBC was a sad one - the funeral of Mahananda, attended by many friends, in April 2009. Works were completed by May, in time for the Wesak Festival and the grand re-opening of the Centre, in the context of a week of talks, festivities, and our urban retreat. Jnanavaca began 2010 by launching our next five-year theme at the LBC, kicking off the 'Five Chief Paths' with the year of Integration, and Subhuti made two visits in his renewed capacity as President of the Centre.

Regular Classes

Paramabandhu and Maitreyaraja handed on leading the Monday class to Silapiya and Lilamani. Padmalila, Vidyadaka and Nandaketu continued to run the Tuesday evening class, which Sanghadasa left in January 2010. The Wednesday daytime class was led by Sraddhapushpa, Achalapriya and Sudarshini, continuing to offer a crèche to help parents attend. Maitreyabandhu continued to lead the Wednesday evening class, with Subhadramati and Jnanavaca also teaching, joined by Palaka, Jayaka and Sraddhagita. We continued to run courses on Thursday evenings on meditation, Buddhism, and ritual. Manjusiha joined Muditasri and Nagarakshita at the Friday class. Sangharatna, Sanghadasa, Vidyadaka, Sumana, Sasanajyoti, Satyadaya and Maitreyaraja regularly taught lunchtime classes at the LBC through out the year. Two new developments for the Centre were the launch by Lilavati of a term-time 'Sunday School', and a regular drop-in Saturday morning meditation session, hosted by Satyadaya and team.

Dharma co-ordination

The Dharma Activities Committee disbanded, and Dhammadassin took on the new task of Dharma co-ordinating at the LBC. This includes working to find an overview for our class structures, exploring how to create a more "clear, comprehensive, progressive and consistent" plan for our teaching, and encouraging more Order involvement in the broad range of teaching opportunities at the LBC. She took on the LBC programme from Maitreyaraja, and met with a number of Order members in their chapters and individually to encourage and invite more involvement in teaching at the LBC. She went on to suggest our new whole-year programme of Vajrasana retreats (all available for booking through the web-site), and our first half-yearly programme of events and related retreats for St Martin's Lane. A meditation teachers' training day was held in March this year by Jnanavaca, Maitreyabandhu and Subhadramati; further ways of developing our teaching and mentoring culture are in the process of being explored.

Meditation and Buddhism courses

We continued to offer a range of courses, including occasional Going Deeper Dharma courses at the Wednesday evening and daytime classes, a puja course, a Cultivating Insight course, and a Life with Full Attention course. With the intention of making good use of our enlarged LBC, and to help bring the Dharma to people who couldn't attend an evening class, daytime introductory meditation courses and Going Deeper Dharma courses were held; these have so far proved small in numbers, as we continue to explore how best to advertise them.

Vajrasana

Vidyadaka left us; on his return from sabbatical Maitreyaraja took on overseeing Vajrasana alongside Abhayavajra. In 2009 our intensive single-sex retreats for men and for women were held in Umbria, Italy. In 2010, to meet a desire to minimise our carbon footprint when it comes to travelling to retreats, and also to have larger, more intensive retreats going on at our own retreat centre, our men's and women's intensive meditation retreats will both be happening 'at home'.

Friends Foods Ltd and Mandala Businesses

Despite the efforts of managers, teams and the Friends Foods Board, the Wild Cherry and Friends Organic both closed this year. In January Lama's Pyjamas (our new charity shop) opened in the Friends Organic building on Roman Road, run by Claudine Edwards and Padmalila; proposals are currently under consideration for a new business in the Wild Cherry space.

Outreach & Website

Satyadaya returned from ordination in 2009, and has taken on a range of outreach projects for the LBC, as well as becoming our part-time caretaker on Palaka's departure in May '10. Carers' classes and retreats continue to run, and Bodhi Tree continues to offer opportunities for schools and others. A new web-site was launched in May '09 specifically to communicate the ethos and activities of Breathing Space.

Communities

A sub-group of the Council (Jnanavaca, Dhammadassin, Subhadramati and Jayaka) invited the communities in LBC properties to a series of meetings, which saw the collaborative creation of a Communities' Ethos document, clarifying principles and current practice in our communities; it is hoped this document will be helpful for both new and existing community members.

The LBC Centre Support Team

The Centre support team was restructured, with Maitreyabandhu stepping into the role of Centre co-ordinator. Sanghadasa left the team; Canute Clarke and Jonathan Wood joined to take on bookings management and programme production. Maitreyaraja returned after a 4-month sabbatical to take on a range of new areas, including Vajrasana and the LBC book-shop. Adam Berrisford swapped Friends Foods book-keeping to become Treasurer of the LBC, taking over from Manjusiha, who becomes our part-time fundraiser.

Dhammadassin

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Breathing Space Report

In the year since the opening of the new Breathing Space venue in the basement, we've moved closer to our goal of becoming a centre of excellence in East London for giving people tools to manage their mental health.

Dare I say it, Breathing Space is already a centre of excellence. At least, that's the view of Lord Richard Layard, the government's adviser on wellbeing. We were delighted when he came to open the new Breathing Space venue. At the event - attended by more than 35 mental health professionals - he described Breathing Space as a 'beacon project' in providing alternative treatments for recurrent depression.

In last year's annual review I spoke of three consecutive phases for Breathing Space: setting up (2004-May 2009); consolidating (to Dec 2010); and reaching out & diversifying (Jan 2011 onwards). As for the first of these, Breathing Space is well set up, with its own venue, administrative systems, branding, website, marketing & promotion, monitoring & evaluation and public service contracts. So we are now in the phase of consolidation, and it's been another solid year.

In 2009-2010 we ran six Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) courses; one Mindfulness Based Relapse Prevention (MBRP) course; one Meditation into Life follow-on course; two Mindfulness Based Smoking Cessation (MBSC) courses; six carers' retreats; a two day MBCT/MBRP retreat; and a weekly after-care session for people who have completed MBCT/MBRP courses. All our courses and retreats were fully booked - many with long waiting lists. 96% of people completing courses rate them as 'helpful' or 'very helpful'. The MBCT/MBRP retreat and the weekly drop-in class are new additions to the Breathing Space portfolio. We were pleased to be offering ongoing support to people through a weekly session, yet we have had to stop this class due to a shortage of teachers and low attendance. Next year our 'baseline' aim will be to run six MBCT courses, one or two MBRP courses, one or three follow on courses, one or two MBCT/MBRP retreats, and six carers' retreats.

Breathing Space enjoyed increasing public sector support - with local authority contracts worth more than £50k per year. Much of this is for our 'Caring for the Carers' project - retreats and drop-in sessions teaching carers simple techniques to manage stress. This year we had contracts with four London Boroughs for the carers work - Tower Hamlets, Hackney, Waltham Forest and Newham. We also trialed a successful new 'Stress management training course' linked to a new 'Breathing Space pocket guide to stress-relief'.

Our biggest contract in the year was with the London Borough of Tower Hamlets (LBTH) to provide free places on courses and retreats for Tower Hamlets residents on a low income. We were successful in our application for more than double the amount of money that we were awarded in 2008-2009. The £21,774 funding provided for 45 free places on MBCT and MBRP courses; 15 free places on a MBCT/MBRP retreat; and a new regular weekly drop-in session for people who have completed MBCT or MBRP courses. We have applied for a continuation of the free places scheme for the next three years - at the same level of funding as this past year.

With increased LBTH funding came more requirements - quarterly monitoring reports on outputs, outcomes, and equalities. We refocused our marketing activities to reach a more diverse population in Tower Hamlets including: two mail-outs to more than 150 local organisations; presentations/taster sessions to 12 local organisations; an advertising campaign in East End Life; telephone marketing and three well attended Open Days. All of this resulted in a trebling of applications for free places compared to last year.

Our new Breathing Space brand and visual identity also helped us get recognised - in particular, through the new dedicated Breathing Space website: www.breathingspacelondon.org.uk. This offers online bookings and applications for free places; comprehensive information about our programme; and background information about depression, addiction and stress.

In this current consolidation phase we have also been focussing on training new teachers. Shortly before Paramabandhu went on a six-month sabbatical, he held a day's training, attended by seven Order Members. Five OMs are joining the team: Priyavajra, Satyadaya, Upeksaraja, Sanghasiha and myself. To ensure we maintain high standards of teaching at Breathing Space, we continue to hold six-weekly teachers' meetings. Training more teachers will continue to be a major focus in the year ahead, to ensure we can run our existing programme and grow it over time.

In the past year Breathing Space and the LBC have hosted a PhD research project into "Men, mindfulness and wellbeing". We met with a supervisor from the University of Westminster to explore other possible research projects hosted by Breathing Space. We also produced our own overview of the scientific research into the benefits of meditation and published it on the Breathing Space website.

So much then for the first two phases of 'setting up' and 'consolidation'. What about the next phase of 'reaching out and diversifying'? As shown above, Breathing Space is getting better known in our local community. We've also been building up a portfolio of out-reach projects - led by Satyadaya - bringing the benefits of Mindfulness Based Approaches to a variety of new audiences.

Next year we want to reach out and diversify further in this way, in the context of an ongoing strategic review of Breathing Space and how it integrates with the LBC's work. We want to make the most of opportunities for Breathing Space to spread the benefits of Mindfulness Based Approaches. To do so our main focus will be training more teachers. We will also do well to keep remembering the core ethos of the LBC's work: 'kalyana mitrata'. I mentioned this last year, and it's so important that it's worth saying again! Everything that we do comes out of friendship - we want to help people. We must ensure that, as Breathing Space grows, we don't lose sight of this.

Maitreyabandhu

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Women's Mitra Convenor's Report

The past 12 months have had both joys and sorrows. I have always been keen to include in my brief as women's Mitra Convenor particular support for women living in communities and working in our businesses; both to support them in the here and now and also in an attempt to ensure that the possibility of this particular lifestyle choice, so rare in today's world, remains open into the future. So I was sad when the Evolution shop, where I had been spending time every week in Dharma study and individual meetings, stopped being a Buddhist-run team. The past year too saw me increasing my involvement with the Wild Cherry in an attempt to save the business. Because I'd worked there myself for over 10 years, with the blessing of the LBC Council, from October onwards I started taking a much more directive role in the business. However, by January we realized that we could not keep the business running when it was losing so much money and Jnanavaca and I were tasked with telling the staff that their jobs were redundant. On the positive side I have been delighted by the opening of Lama's Pyjamas (not only for the enhancement of my wardrobe!). I have started a weekly study group for Claudine and Padmalila from Lama's Pyjamas together with Hilary and Sarah from Jambala - a real highlight.

Another highlight has been the twice-yearly Mitra Convenors meeting, held at one or other of our retreat centres. At the most recent one we reviewed the current Mitra system which has been operational since 2002. We concluded that generally the system of people becoming Mitras is working well. At the same time we wanted to give attention to a few things, one of which was exploration of the third declaration (that a Mitra is someone who wants to deepen their exploration of Buddhism within the context of the FWBO) to include the Mitra's participation in creating Sangha. With a general culture on the private life of the individual it seemed important to keep highlighting the importance of Sangha, friendship, and collective projects. Last year too saw the first ever international retreat for all Chairs and Mitra Convenors, led by some of the College of Public Preceptors, and attended by about 80 of us.

Meeting women who wish to become Mitras and then witnessing them take that step continues to be a delight. Since my last report 12 women have become Mitras. Also since my last report 3 women have been ordained into the WBO (Padmagita, Saravantu and Jayakara) and 3 more have been invited onto ordination retreats (Wendy Young, Jo Bennett and Anna Robinson). 11 more women have been inspired to ask for ordination. Sadhu!

I'm very grateful to all those who lead or support study groups for Mitras. Currently 10 Dharmacarinis and one Mitra are involved in leading or supporting 5 groups. I'm pleased too that we've been able to extend the hand of friendship and offer study to a few Mitras from beyond the LBC for whom study is otherwise unavailable.

I'm grateful too to those who lead other events for mitras. We've had an intensive meditation retreat in Umbria, a mitra day event, two weekend retreats, and a study course. I was particularly pleased to take part in a London-wide Order/Mitra day for women held at the North London Buddhist Centre in December. It was very well attended and we will be hosting a similar event here at the LBC in May.

Subhadramati

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Men's Mitra Convenor's Report

In May it will be a year since I became Mens Mitra convenor which brings with it new responsibilities. When Subhuti conducted the ritual to mark the hand over from Jnanavaca he said that I would have to grow into the role which has certainly been the case. When I was ordained I felt something similar: I described it then as putting on a large pair of boots and having to grow into them. I'm sure it will be an ongoing process. Recently I handed over some of the last of my old responsibilities which means I can settle into things a bit more.

Since this is my first 'Report' to the LBC Sangha then maybe I should say a little about myself. I came to the LBC for the first time in 1999 after, by chance, driving by and noticing flags and banners outside the Centre. Some weeks later I came to the Wednesday evening drop-in class and learned to meditate. I gradually became more interested in the Dharma and found it didn't really make any sense to me to meditate and not practise ethics - fundamentally they were pointing at the same thing. I asked to become a Mitra and then requested ordination. In 2002 I was asked if I'd join the LBC team and said 'No', which was something I often said when I was scared. I began to realise that I couldn't pass up the opportunity to work with other Buddhists so joined the team mainly to oversee maintenance of the LBC properties which (I'm still doing). I was ordained in 2004 while living in Sukhavati Men's Community.

This past year has seen 4 men become Dharmacharis they - Saddhasura, Manjusiha, Satyadaya and Sanghasiha. They have all been making generous contributions to the Mandala which is great to see. Four men have requested ordination into the Triratna Buddhist Order and another 2 - both friends of mine are going on the ordination course. Adrian Gifford who has given so much through his involvement with the conversion of Potash Farm to Vajrasana retreat centre and the more recent building project at the LBC. Juan Carlos Perianez who lived in Sukhavati community for 7 years and contributed so very much to it. Another 10 men have become Mitras, some of whom will be starting their new Dharma Training group alongside the other 3 mens groups which are already running.

In my own practise I am very much focusing on Kalayamitrata [Spiritual Friendship] and noticing more and more how difficult it is to grow without it. I experience it as flowing in and flowing out, like a positive moving energy - I receive spiritual sustenance from my friends and that can flow out again as sustenance for others.

I'm very pleased to be able to be Mens Mitra Convenor at the LBC, it is a great opportunity to take my practise further. I'm aware of the fine lineage of the most recent Convenors: Maitreyabandhu was Mens Mitra Convenor when I first came along, then Paramanabadhu and then Jnanavaca who has moved on to become our Chairman.

Jayaka