

# The Big Thank You

## the abundant treasures newsletter *issue 1 may 2009*

This is the first ever newsletter for all supporters of the Manchester Buddhist Centre. Ever since I took on the job of fundraising I have been thinking of ways to thank everyone who gives or has given to the centre, with donations of money or with time and energy. In fact I have seen this as my main task because without your help we wouldn't be able to do what we do. This newsletter is one of the ways in which I can do that, hence its name.

Why the whacky typefaces for the title? This harks back to an event I organized for our supporters last summer, called The Big Thank You. If you were there you may remember that at the end of my Power Point Presentation I showed about twenty slides with four 'thank you' messages on each slide, each one with different fonts and colours. I hadn't thought of it at the time, but now I see what I was unconsciously trying to communicate: as you know, many different kinds of people come to the Centre, and the different letters signify this - we come in all shapes, sizes, colours and styles!

I hope you find this first newsletter interesting, informative and even perhaps moving. Over the next few pages you'll read four short articles from people who attend the Centre, describing their experiences (this is the moving part!). I've also written an article about the Centre's finances, letting you know where we are currently at, and where your money goes (this is the informative part).

I hope you enjoy reading it. Let me know what you think.

Ratnaguna.

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### Contents:

<b>Journey to The Buddha</b> – Sarah Ball .....	Page 2
<b>Why do I come to the Manchester Buddhist centre?</b> – Kevin Statham.....	Page 3
<b>It does what it says on the tin</b> - Margaret Rogers .....	Page 4
<b>What keeps me coming to the Buddhist Centre?</b> - Maria Graham .....	Page 5
<b>The Centre's Finances Explained</b> – Ratnaguna .....	Page 6

## Journey to the Buddha

*Sarah Ball*

How do you start? From the heart I think. What is a journey? Is it a word? Or the realization that a small change can be so simple you can feel its beauty?

I Hope I caught your attention, and if I did I hope that you stay with me, even for a few minutes. I realize now that if this piece makes a difference to just one person today then I have done my work, said what needed to be said. Connected with you, whoever you are reading this.

Let me take you back a year. I'd do my days work; I'd watch GMTV with my favourite Special K dish. I'd have worries, feelings, upsets - the biggest at the end of 2007! What a year that was! If I think back, I can't think of the defining moment that made me pick up the phone that day and call the Buddhist Centre, all I can say was that it was a 'something needs to change' moment.

I remember coming that first time to the Buddhist Centre and the first people I saw were two Buddhist monks in robes! A bit overwhelming for a non-Buddhist. Slowly though a connection was made through attending the Buddhism 1, 2 and 3 courses. Friendships were formed. I'd come every week listening to the initial teachings the Buddha gave. I remember being totally taken a back by some of it, but I kept coming. You see Buddhism is mainly whatever you want it to be. You like a particular teaching or text, you study that. At the moment I enjoy the early texts about the Buddha being human like you and me.

It's laid back here at the Buddhist centre, people are warm and friendly and as you come through the door you leave the rat race behind. I think after a year of coming here there are so many good points about what is done here. It's like a door has been opened and someone has invited me in. I don't know about you but I love that 'aha' moment of discovery, the connection and even smell of a place. Manchester has that with its streets full of Victorian stories and the grit of Tony Wilson's era. The Buddhist centre has that sense of welcoming, the creaky floors, the smell of incense, and the smiling faces at the open door!

I could go on but Ratnaguna asked me to write just a page! He's one of my teachers and he asked me to write about my experience of the Buddhist Centre since I first came here just over a year ago. I think I'd now like to leave you with a few thoughts about my time here. There are times I have laughed, there are times I have cried, but there are times I have left here thinking I could climb a mountain and achieve anything! It has inspired me to pursue my dream of teaching and taught me the importance of a moment. Finally I want you to remember to be creative to continue to cultivate your plans, and as a wise man once said, there is always hope.

## Why do I come to the Manchester Buddhist centre?

*Kevin Statham*

One of the fundamental lessons of Buddhism is that this life is suffering. Now for most of us it doesn't take a 2500 year old religion to tell us this is more or less the case, but what can we do about it? One option is to anaesthetize oneself, another is to distract oneself, but both of these are ultimately unsatisfactory. So is there an alternative? In my case I reached a point in my life where I wanted to be happy and not to upset people. Also I found I had turned into one of those 'slapping the kids in Tesco' type of Dad – not good. Luckily I was handed a flyer about the MBC and thought that learning to meditate would help. I am one of those people who always go for the bargain so I went for the Meditation and Buddhism course (buy one get one free!) and never looked back.

Buddhism has shown me many things that have changed my life and changed the way I view the world. However there are still many things I have yet to get my head around – emptiness, going for refuge, the Diamond Sutra (what's all that about?) etc. That is why I keep coming back. It's the faith that the insights I have had are a shallow reflection of my own potential and that there is so much more to learn.

Why the MBC? Although the building itself is very beautiful and special, for me it's the people. Such a concentration of genuinely nice people with clear minds and open hearts is an inspiration. There are very few role models these days and here I am blessed with a whole centre of heroes!

So what would life be like for me if I hadn't found the MBC? Well there is a family history of depression and I am sure that black cloud would now be a companion. I have learnt to love my two boys and help and support them with all my heart. I am sure my work, marriage, friendships would all have suffered. In fact the suffering of this life would be very, very acute.

I was listening to one of Sangharakshita's talks from his digital legacy CD's and he said that when he ordained the first twelve people into the Western Buddhist Order it felt like one lamp lighting a dozen others. I suppose this is what is happening all the time at the MBC. I see people come to the centre and, after a time, they seem to get an extra dimension, their eyes become shiny and, maybe, a lamp has been lit.

The other evening at the Sangha Night class we were discussing the meeting between Atisha and his disciple Dromtonpa. The outcome was that if you have certain realizations then your life will become 'one flowing act of transcendent giving and ever flowing transcendent wisdom'. "That sounds perfect but how do we do it?" I asked at the question and answer session at the end. Ratnaguna then replied in his usual calm voice "don't worry; we will be covering that next Monday!" All I need to do now is to learn to listen and maybe my lamp will glow a little brighter.

**It does what it says on the tin**

*Margaret Rogers*

I am delighted to have been asked to write a short piece about my experiences at the Manchester Buddhist Centre (MBC) for the newsletter. I am a relative newcomer to the MBC (and to Buddhism) and yet have had so many positive encounters. These began in August 2008 when I accompanied a friend to the Centre, who had an appointment at Bodywise. I was immediately impressed with the beauty and peacefulness of the building and friendliness of the receptionist. As an avid reader, my attention was instantly drawn to the shop on the ground floor with its accessible displays of books, DVDs and CDs. Indeed, I bought two meditation CDs and have never looked back! I rather think that it was this helpful encounter that encouraged me to finally do something about a long held desire to learn about Buddhism, because within the month I had registered for the six week Buddhism 1 course. As I had only just returned to work after a long absence I really appreciated being offered a reduced fee to pay for the classes.

On the course, we learned about Buddhism and meditation with two enthusiastic facilitators and two friendly assistants. Our classes were held in the beautiful and spiritual Lotus Hall but our learning spilled over into the tea breaks as the tutors were always accessible and keen to be helpful. My attention was regularly drawn back to the shop and the enticing books. Also, as I had found my meditation CDs so helpful, I wanted a third title by the same person. When I couldn't find it, I spoke with the receptionist who confirmed that it wasn't available but she immediately offered to order it. I was pleasantly and genuinely surprised to find it there the very next week. I was also pleased to learn that I could access the resources in the library and found it a pleasant place to sit and read. Although I registered for the Buddhism 2 course on the final night of the first series, I had really made my mind up to continue my learning at the MBC well before that.

I found the learning environment for the Buddhism 2 course equally stimulating even if the Vajra Hall was substantially smaller than the Lotus Hall. Each session began with meditation with students from the Buddhism 3 course and so we had the opportunity to enjoy a shared experience which is difficult to describe. I guess I find practicing the Metta Bhavana surrounded by others doing the same to be extremely powerful and inspiring - a real chance to be enveloped in loving kindness. So you can imagine that I truly felt that I was missing something special when I couldn't attend the day retreats associated with these courses.

Having completed the Buddhism 2 course, we were invited to continue our involvement with MBC in a variety of ways such as: enrolling in further courses; attending Sangha nights; and going on retreats. I knew I wanted to continue learning about Buddhism and developing my spirituality and so had to make a difficult choice because there are not enough days in the week!

I opted to participate in a weekly study group where we gathered to discuss selected essays about challenging issues related to modern western living and how Buddhism can offer remedies to these. Our group was small and our facilitator flexible who adapted his approach to accommodate our various learning needs.

I've had a very short break from my weekly visits to the MBC because of personal constraints and I must admit that I can't wait to get back. I think I can sincerely say that I miss people and the atmosphere as it seems to embody the antidote to the three root poisons. In essence it does what it says on the tin: offering generosity, wisdom and compassion.

### **What keeps me coming to the Buddhist Centre?**

*Maria Graham*

Ratnaguna asked me to write about what keeps me coming to the Manchester Buddhist Centre. I'd not given this much thought before now, but on reflection I guess I've attended quite regularly - Sangha nights most weeks, workshops from time to time, study groups, etc - in the nearly five years I've been coming along.

From day one, my experience of MBC has been uplifting, right from walking through the door, feeling the good energy, taking in the visual impact of the beautiful surroundings - and that was before seeing the shrine rooms! It was a delight and still continues to be so. What surprises me is that I haven't lost my enthusiasm, which usually happens when I've pursued something for a while and then lost interest. Maybe that's because practicing Buddhism is more a process, like being on a journey where newness is always present.

It helps to have insights and glimpses of the truth of the Buddha's teachings and sharing the experiences with Sangha members. This, I find, makes for a heartfelt connection. Knowing we are trying and struggling in our own ways to practice the Dharma is inspirational.

I had my Mitra ceremony around three years ago. The memory of the commitment is very special and all the well-wishing and warmth that was expressed to me that night has stayed with me.

The FWBO, I find, is particularly open-minded and accepting of people. I've never felt pressured to take anything on that has not felt right at the time. I'm not saying that I shouldn't have my comfort zone challenged, but allowing me to go at my own pace has been very important. I like the 'ordinary' in the people who attend, a good cross-section of society - and no shaved heads or orange robes! (Mind you, I don't know what the Order Members get up to when we mere mortals are not around! *Not much! Ed.*)

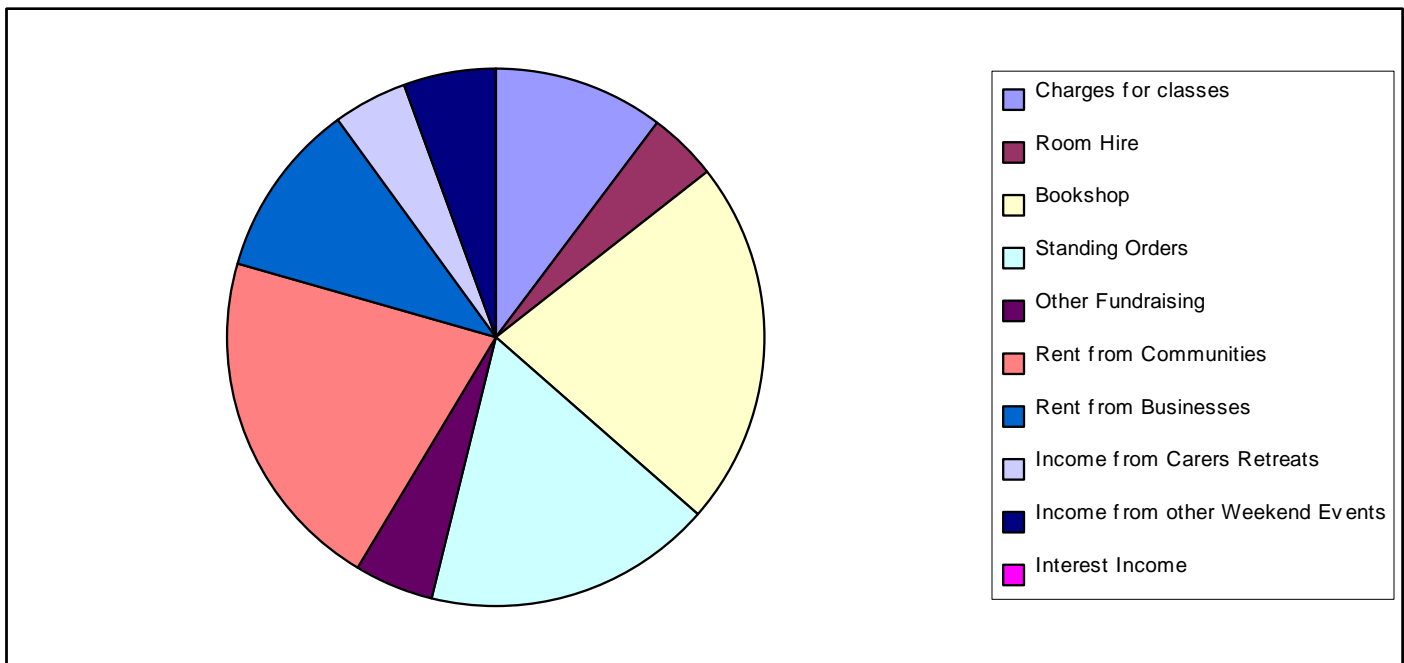
As I am writing this, I'm thinking how much I really appreciate this wonderful place and how grateful I am to all the Sangha for working so hard to keep it going. May the Dana boxes swell and be happy!

**The Centre's Finances Explained**  
*Ratnaguna*

If you give money to the Centre you may be interested on knowing a little about its financial situation – where we get our money from (apart from what you give!) and where your money goes. Here are the figures from last year, and in order to make this reader-friendly I've simplified the data. Fiona, our accountant, has told me that these figures are not completely finalised as the external accountants have not yet examined them; however, they are unlikely to change significantly.

I have put the income and expenditure figures into pie-charts to make it easier to take in the overview; I'm also giving you an explanation of the figures below, so you can see what's in them.

**Income:**



**Charges for classes: £26,182** (Buddhism and meditation courses on Tuesday and Wednesday evenings respectively)

**Room hire: £10,840** (Mainly the Library and Meeting Room to outside groups, and Shrine Halls for Breathworks courses)

**Bookshop sales: £56,173**

**Standing Orders: £45,294** (including Gift Aid £9,600)

**Other fundraising: £11,970**

**Rent from Communities: £53,721** (The MBC owns three residential Buddhist communities)

**Rent from Businesses: £26,770** (i.e. Earth Café, Bodywise, Breathworks and Clear Vision)

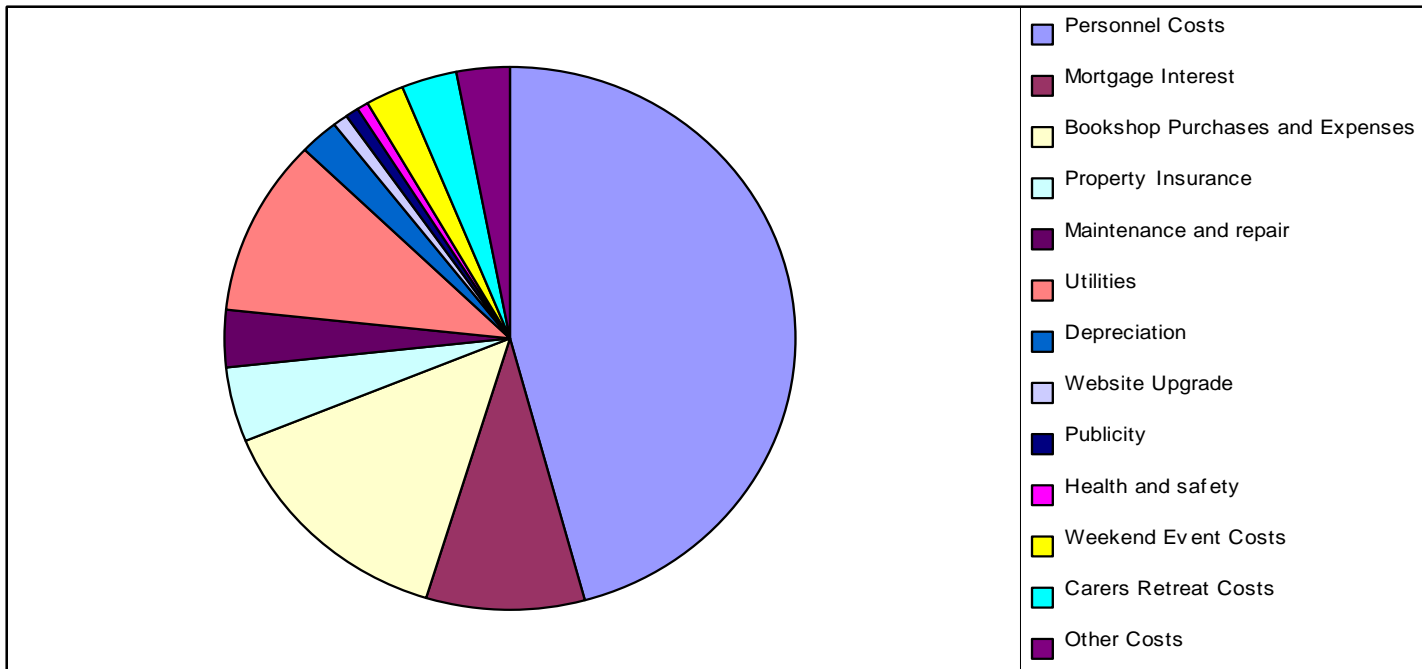
**Income from Carers Retreats: £11,458**

**Income from other Weekend Events: £14,195**

**Interest income: £199**

**Total Income: £256,803**

**Expenditure:**



**Personnel costs: £107,802**

**Mortgage Interest: £20,737** (Interest on mortgages for 2 residential properties and loans given by members of the sangha)

**Bookshop Purchases and Expenses: £33,802**

**Property Insurance: £9,924**

**Maintenance & Repair: £8,305**

**Utilities: £24,279** (gas, electricity etc)

**Depreciation: £5,243**

**Website Upgrade: £2,452**

**Publicity: £1,692**

**Health and Safety: £1,109**

**Weekend Event Costs: £5,307**

**Carers Retreat Costs: £7,205**

**Other Costs: £7,267** (too many items to relate, each one less than £1,000)

**Total Expenditure: £234,628**

This means that our net income for 2008 was about £22,000 – which is a big improvement over previous years. In 2007, for example, we had a loss of almost £32,000!

However, this is only part of the story. We have used the income we generated to repay the capital portion of our loans (£15,901), and to carry out some essential building work on one of the residential communities (£10,340.) This latter shows as capital expenditure in the accounts, as it is such a large item that will add to the value of the community. Once these figures are taken into account, this actually means we have more than used up the profit we made in the year.

So we did a lot better in 2008 than we did in 2007, but we still have a lot to do. In one of my reports in the MBC Newsletter I wrote that it will probably take us about five years to turn our finances around completely, and I want to say a little about that now. At a recent meeting of the Trustees of the charity that runs the MBC, we heard from Frank Williams, a Mitra and retired architect who specialized in the restoration of old buildings. He told us that there are a number of things that we need to do over the next three to four years to preserve our beautiful building. Due to our financial crisis of the last few years we've been unable to do any of this vital work, but we do need to start soon, otherwise the building will deteriorate. This year we have to repair the fire escape, which will cost around £10,000. The next job will be to start weather-proofing all the windows in the building – a massive job! We also need to make a start on secondary-glazing the windows, to preserve heat and reduce noise.

So when I talk about 'turning our finances around' all this needs to be taken into account. Not to mention the fact that it would be prudent to have a higher level of cash reserves than we have been able to over the last few years. We've had to spend all our reserves during our financial crisis, and we now need to rebuild them.

But I don't want to dwell on that right now. I want to thank all of you who have given to the Centre in the last year or more. Without your help we wouldn't have survived.

Thank You Thank You

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