

Drawing Strength from our Sangha across the Globe

Taraloka - Reporting back from *The Great Gathering Online*:
Drawing Strength from the Songs of the Sisters



Some of the Taraloka team: Kathy, Beate, Maitrimati, Maitridevi, Maitrisiddhi

This gathering of Dharmacharinis and women training for ordination truly became a Great Gathering - with **many hundreds listening to Dharma presentations & meditations on the Therigatha**, the songs of the women disciples of the Buddha, and **nearly ninety women participating in the online pujas**, jointly held by Tiratanaloka and Taraloka. The atmosphere in the pujas was startling, given that it was all online.

At Taraloka we had no idea how this was going to work out. I think it became clear that we were doing something different to – rather than lesser than – a usual residential weekend when the international bookings started coming. We had to record one little social media video a couple of times as Hridayagita kept crying with emotion that **women from Istanbul, the Netherlands, Canada, Finland and the USA and more were coming – let alone Europe and the UK!** My personal favourite moment was seeing that the NZ women had got up before the dawn to join the pujas, and their windows slowly lightened as ours darkened toward dusk. Sadhu!

From the start of that weekend onwards, women's emails of appreciation have kept on coming. They're still rolling in, even now!!

Here, I've asked a few of the women on the event to share something of their situations and their responses to the Great Gathering.



Laura, New York City

'Imagine seeing thousands of faces as you move through your work day, in the crowded streets, subway system, and the tourist attractions that bring people from every corner of the world. Now imagine, the barren streets, restaurants, shops, venues of entertainment that are "closed till further notice due to Covid-19". **Daily life for New Yorkers came to an alarming and**

sudden halt. We're in lockdown, feeling isolated in ways New Yorkers have never experienced. News is pouring in daily that thousands of New Yorkers have already died from Covid-19 and the numbers are increasing. Yet, every evening in the last 2 months at 7pm sharp, thousands shout out their windows, applaud, clang pots and pans, to show their appreciation to the healthcare workers on the front lines that are risking their lives to save others. This is the spirit of NYC. (Ed: Laura doesn't mention anything about the death of George Floyd & following events as they hadn't happened at this point)



31 May, Central Park, NYC with (from left to right) Samayasri, Padmadharini, Laura, and Srisara.

The Great Gathering was a wonderful opportunity to connect with TFO mitras and Order members across the world who share the love of The Three Jewels, particularly at a time many of us are feeling the same isolation, fear, and uncertainty. I felt so held by the Order members who put such energy and love into The Great Gathering 2020 experience. It lifted my spirits and reminded me how grateful and lucky I am to have this practice and family of exceptional women.'

- **Laura**

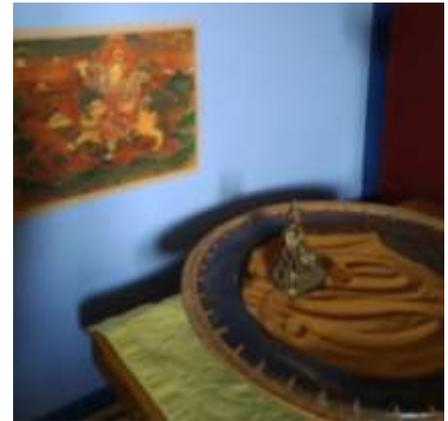


- **Anna, Arnhem, The Netherlands**

"I said yesterday to a dear friend, it is like there is for certain a new atmosphere in the house. Because in my room there have been a wonderful Puja. **Like in the shrine room during a normal retreat there can be a special energy. So it is now, a special space to practise and enjoy.** Coming home in the Transcendental!

It was wonderful to feel the great connection with women all over the world, in sharing the Dharma online. To get the opportunity still to go on retreat on a weekend with them and the Theris, the first Buddhist women. **For me it felt serious, as a heartfelt practice during these couple of days.**

The meditations, pujas and talks were special for me, about being a woman as Buddhist, and how the early sisters had their struggle to find a place in that world. And how we are doing the same, finding comfort and depth in the Sangha and in Going for Refuge. **That was what we all shared - all these women within Triratna, from all over the world, including my Sangha** - Arnhem in the Netherlands. I did the retreat with the other GFR mitra from Arnhem. That felt so nice! I feel aware of our connectedness, and aware of receiving the fruits of this gift from Taraloka and Tiratanaloka."



- **Anna**



Annette, South Wales, UK – in and out of PPE

'Living 70 mins from the nearest centre in Wales has always meant that Sangha contact came at some expense and effort. **At the beginning of the lock down I could see the opportunity for solitude but equally braced myself for feeling simply lonely.** I am lucky in that I have work and at the same time it has been very busy and often challenging. Nature on my doorstep has been a real bonus.

Being able to connect with sangha online in the way it has now developed has been a real blessing and I guess surprise. **The sense of connectedness, the ease with which to bring friends and people unknown to my living room has been phenomenally supportive and inspiring.** At the Great Gathering I 'saw' women from different countries whom I have had a connection and practised with in the past. I would likely have lost sight of them this year and the joined practice has been inspiring and touched my heart.





I have now created a small garden for Kuan Yin and feel much closer again to the ritual aspect of the practice and the inner connection to devotion and beauty. **It has been heart warming to see the effort and willingness to step into the unknown that both teams brought to the 'tablet'.** Online practice does not replace Face2Face Sangha but it strikes me as a new addition - I wonder how many people out here will connect with the Dharma because it is now within reach at their fingertips, at least as an entry point.

"Tradition is keeping the fire alive not worshipping the ashes"

Sadhu Taraloka, Sadhu Tiratnaloka!

- **Annette**

Christine, Vancouver B C, Canada

'I signed onto the Great Gathering the minute I learned about it, stoked by the possibility of practising alongside my old GFR friends and with the familiar and beloved contexts of Tara- and Tiratnaloka.'



'I returned to Canada nearly two years ago, after ten years in the UK. **Being in Pacific Standard Time is like being on the edge of the world, far away from everything.**

Practising on Zoom, alongside my Dharma sisters both local and eight time zones away, was wonderful. While there was limited opportunity to chat or feel seen, the content was fab and the live events had some magic to them. It was so delightful to hear the Pali Canon Puja - replete with verses I have studied over the years. **I don't remember the last time I was so moved by a puja, even in spite of the virtual element** and it being 11am (as I associate puja with twilight)!'

Here in Vancouver BC, the pandemic has been nicely contained and the restrictive measures have been eased. I've been self-isolating and under-employed with my partner on the north shore, which has meant spending heaps of time beside the local river, Lynn Creek, exploring it from the mouth, through the canyon and all the way to the headwaters. '

Tiina, Helsinki, Finland

'At the moment Finland is loosening some restrictions and the air feels a little bit lighter. Our centre here in Helsinki is staying online at least for now. **To me this has been an excellent time for slowing down and turning inwards but also discovering what turning outwards could look like at a time like this.**



I was really happy to be able to join the Great Gathering: in the normal circumstances it would have not happened. **During lockdown I have been surprised how well online retreats and workshops actually work and the effect they have.** I feel really supported and connected to the local sangha but also the Triratna sangha world wide.'

- Tiina



Justine, Auckland, New Zealand

'This has come at such a strange and hectic time as we transition out of lockdown in NZ - **in some way this has made the experience even more special** from the expansive post puja space and my shrine outside my daughters bedrooms and into making school

lunches, walking the dog, finding homework and then to the office to get ready for opening to clients.

It has in many ways been very integrating and helpful to carry the inspiration and softening through into the bustle of daily life ...So nourishing in meeting the tension and fear and selfing around security needs and discovering 'new ways of living' as we still need to distance while we connect...'

- Justine, New Zealand

Taraloka is running further online events to keep us all connected to our inspiration and each other!

Take a look here