

UK BK Eco Retreat

29 – 31 March 2019 at Worthing

On Friday evening, BKs gathered from many areas around the UK: Isle of Man, York, Leicester, Nottingham, London and Brighton. We also had one sister joining us from Turkey!

The retreat started with introductions and sharing of news and developments since the last retreat as well as what we wanted to get out of the weekend.

On Saturday, the first session continued with news but in more depth. Maria updated us on the latest successes of the Eco Friends at GCH with, for example, the introduction of biodegradable tableware for large events. There had also been connections made with other groups and projects in the London area such as Faith for the Climate Network and Brent Friends of the Earth. Jane took us through a very interesting slide show illustrating all the different activities that had been held at a BK stand of the Eco Living area at the Vegan Life Live show in March in London. This included a talk by Sister Maureen. Carole and Sylvia told us about several workshops they had facilitated in the Midlands as part of the Living the Change project. Carole had also done one for the Lincoln Interfaith group called Step Lightly on the Earth. At the end we discussed in small groups how we could use or apply any of the things we had learned in our own context.



After a break, Nirmala led a session entitled: Greening Our Sacred Space which encouraged us to create our own inner 'green' space and involved plenty of visualization and creative expression using the five senses and the five elements of nature.

In the afternoon, there was an opportunity for Chi Kung exercise and movement with Dulce before tea.

After tea, Carole led a very useful session called: Waste into Wonders. This was very informative and also a lot of fun!

Amongst many useful ideas demonstrated, Carole showed us how to make decorative candles out of left over candle stubs; how to use old plastic containers as planters for herbs and salad leaves and how to find food for free in the countryside. There was even some very practical information about how to create an outdoor toilet with a bucket, sand and gravel for times of emergency! Our final session of the day was with Robert who showed us how we can use creative writing to discover our own inner 'genius' and connect with the Earth. The workshop explored 'pantsing' (the opposite of planning) as a way of unlocking the unconscious process of the mind. Using word association we created a mind map which then formed the basis for a short story, out of which we created an affirmation to use in our lives.





On Sunday the aim of the final morning was to explore projects for the year ahead. Nirmala introduced the session and explained the process of the foot-free project groups. There were three topics to choose from, each led by one facilitator. The remainder of the participants were free to join any of the groups and stay for as long as they felt they could contribute or learn something and then could move on.

The groups were: 1. Exploring topics for 'green' events with Maria; 2. Plastic-free Yagya and Green Champions with Joanna and 3. Developing an Eco Training Course Curriculum for 'Green Champions' with Nirmala. The main points were as follows:

- A number of topics were generated including one to be used for a talk at GCH on 6th June, dedicated to World Environment Day: Discovering the Secrets of the Future.
- Four modules were mapped out for the training day: 1. Overview of BKEI; 2. Integrating Spirituality with Sustainable Lifestyle; 3. Introducing Eco Living and 4. Living the Change.
- Once trained, then Green Champions would help Centres to decrease use of plastic, to adopt eco-friendly systems and generally to develop initiatives and events.
- The current group would be the first 'Green Champions' and would trial the training and then could encourage each centre to appoint one person.
- First project for Plastic-free Yagya UK is to source an alternative to the plastic wrappings for tolis which have started to be used more and more.
- With regard to all eco issues, it was felt that an educational approach was needed when interacting with BKs, so careful research needed to be done for materials such as informative videos.
- In order to encourage BKs to adopt a vegan diet, it was thought that putting together a list of items that could be used in place of dairy for popular Indian dishes would be a helpful resource.

At the end, everyone shared their learning and inspirations from the retreat and ideas were generated for next time.

