



VAJRA BELL

Volume 9 Issue II

April 2011

Clarity, Care, Continuity & Categorization

The Multi-Faceted Practice of Right Mindfulness

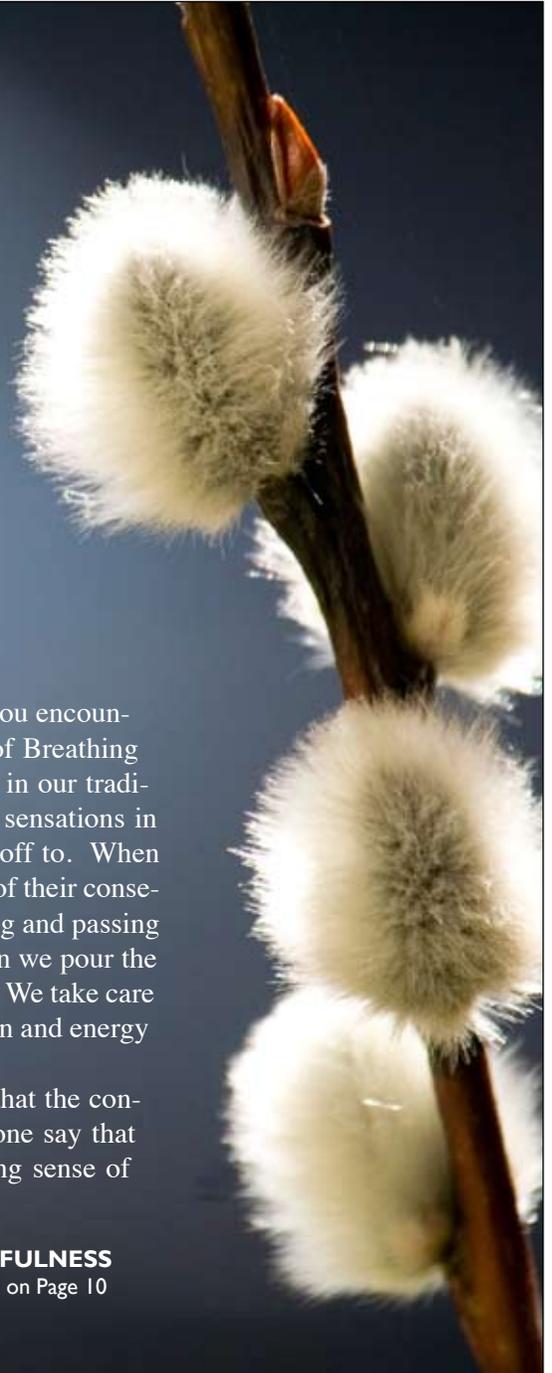
By Eric Wentworth

Mindfulness. It's more than likely one of the first concepts you encountered when you discovered Buddhism. The Mindfulness of Breathing practice is the first form of meditation taught to beginners in our tradition. We learn to stay with the breath, to be aware of the sensations in our bodies, to stay conscious of where our minds wander off to. When we work with the precepts we remain mindful of our actions and mindful of their consequences. We attend to our mental states through awareness of their arising and passing away. In our everyday lives we strive to be in the present moment - when we pour the tea we simply pour the tea, when we cook the food we just cook the food. We take care to be mindful in our interactions with others, giving them our full attention and energy while we are with them.

When you have been practicing for a while, you might begin to feel that the concept of mindfulness has become very familiar. I haven't yet heard anyone say that they feel as if they've perfected it, but you may have developed a strong sense of what mindfulness is, and what it is not.

RIGHT MINDFULNESS

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Aryaloka Buddhist Center
14 Heartwood Circle, Newmarket, NH 03857

From the Editor

By Eric Wentworth



On our multi-issue journey through each step of the Eightfold Path, we now rest on Right Mindfulness, or as our teacher, Sangharakshita, prefers to translate it, Right Awareness.

Mindfulness is a thread which ties together everything we do as Buddhists. Before we can begin to acquire any sort of wisdom we first have to learn to open our eyes and our minds and see what's actually there.

In the seen only the seen, in the heard only the heard... this is basic, but oh, so very difficult.

More than just seeing, genuine mindful-

ness is an absorption into the flow of life. We're present with our experience in the moment, but we're also using our faculties of analysis and intuition and ethical action.

We're uniting our efforts behind a radical premise - that in every moment we have a choice about our own evolution, and to make effective choices about that evolution we must pay careful attention, and constantly test and work with our assumptions and tendencies.

If I may be so bold, the application of mindfulness is like the key to an exit door that we walk through to reclaim our lives from samsara, the endlessly conditioned rounds of existence. With mindfulness we take each step on our long journey to waking up. Powerful stuff, that is.

It's hardly any wonder that the Buddha's dying words entreated us to strive on with mindfulness.

Musings from the Chair

By Dh. Dayalocana



In April we celebrate the Triratna Buddhist Community. We acknowledge the importance of both our local community at Aryaloka and the Triratna Centers and communities throughout the world.

Sangharakshita speaks of a spiritual community as an association of committed individuals, freely working together for a common spiritual end. He describes members of such a community as carrying on with individual practice: meditation, study, observing precepts and coming together on the basis of a common spiritual ideal. Members of a spiritual community support, encourage, and inspire one another.

In several suttas, the Buddha spoke about the importance of spiritual friendship. In his book, *Buddhism and Friend-*

ship, Subhuti reminds us of the friendship among Anuruddha, Nandiya, and Kimbila who are living together in a forest grove. (page 31) The Buddha visits them asking about their health and way of life together. Anuruddha replies that they are living in concord, with mutual appreciation, without disputing, blending like milk and water, viewing each other with kindly eyes. He says the way they live together is an expression of kindness, in deeds, speech and thoughts. You may be interested to read the entire story in the *Culagosinga Sutta* in the *Majjhima Nikaya*.

Indeed practicing together as a spiritual community with friendliness, kindness, harmony, and mutual regard gives each of us the opportunity to develop greater awareness, deeper understanding, and compassion. I suggest that we continue to celebrate and appreciate the Triratna Buddhist Community throughout the year!

Dharmacharini Dayalocana
Chair, Aryaloka Buddhist Center

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How Can You Contribute to the Vajra Bell?

As a sangha, one of the most important things we do is to share our individual experiences of the spiritual life. By contributing our own stories to the richly-flavored stew of Dharma life that surrounds our center, we create strong connections between each other and strengthen each others' practices, sometimes without even knowing it. Just by telling another person about something you know or an experience you've had, you may provide the missing part to a puzzle that has been unfinished in their mind. You may bring them peace, simply in the knowledge that they are not the only one struggling with an issue. You might say the right word at just the right moment that will alter their lives forever.

With this in mind, if you've ever been interested in contributing to the Vajra Bell, this is the time to do it! Have you taken an amazing photo lately? We can use one! Trying your hand at poetry? We're eager to share one of your poems. If you've attended a retreat or event at an Triratna center, we would love to have you write something about it for us. If you have a great website to share, a Dharma movie you're eager to talk about, or a page-turner of a Buddhist book that you have to let everyone know about, let us know! There are so many ways that you can enrich the pages of the Vajra Bell - let your imaginations run wild!

So, you say that you're not a great writer? Well, now is the chance to chal-

lenge that self-view. The Vajra Bell kula has among its volunteers an excellent set of editors to help you on your way. Have an idea, but you're not sure if it's prime-time material? Let us know what you're thinking - it may grow from a seedling thought into a solid story.

The important thing is to take the leap. You never know what will happen unless you give it a shot, and there may be someone out there just waiting for what you have to say.

To contribute, or to suggest an idea for a future issue of the Vajra Bell, you can contact any of the kula volunteers, listed in the contact column on page two of this issue, by email or in person.

The Council

By Dh. Vihanasari

As a Council, we continue to restructure our working roles. Members have signed up to serve on one or more of four teams: Spiritual/Program, Finance, Administration, and Facility. Other sangha members will also be invited to serve on these teams and existing kulas, staff, and additional ad hoc committees will be grouped under the umbrella of one of these four areas. This restructuring is just in the beginning stages, and is currently a work-in-progress.

As part of the restructuring process, the Council will also develop a communication plan in order to keep everyone informed of what is happening and to receive feedback. Members are also working on a Council Member Roles and Responsibilities document to help guide our work.

Much appreciation and gratitude to Viriyalila, who has recently retired from the Council. Viriyalila has served for a number of years on the Council, both as a member and as secretary. Her generous gifts of time, energy, expertise, and creative ideas have

contributed greatly to the center over time. Many thanks, and may you find much happiness in future projects! Sadhu!

We continue to address space issues at the center, especially around Sangha Night gatherings.

We are exploring a number of options to ease the crowding and to provide additional meditation mats and cushions.

Visitors are welcome at Council meetings.

Please contact Dayalocana to make arrangements.

Please be sure
Aryaloka's windows
stay closed in
winter and remember
to close them when
leaving the center
in warmer months.

Thank you
very much!



clearvision

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For Your Information...

Triratna Centers in the U.S.:

Newmarket, NH
Portland, ME
Lubec, ME
Somerville, MA
New York City, NY
Missoula, MT
San Francisco, CA
Seattle, WA -- Richland, WA.

Sangha Notes - "What's Happening?"

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR: For quite some time now, the Vajra Bell has been bringing you the latest news from Aryaloka as well as our other Triratna centers in Portland, Boston, and Concord.

As part of an effort to facilitate awareness, communication, and unity with all of our North American Triratna sangha members and centers, the Vajra Bell kula is pleased and excited to announce that our regular *Sangha Notes* column will henceforth include news from all of our regularly contributing centers from across the continent.

In this issue of the Vajra Bell we have the pleasure of hearing from our brothers and sisters in New York City, courtesy of GFR mitra Steve Bell! We continue to develop connections with other sanghas in California, Montana, Washington, and the Canadian provinces, and hope to have more news from those locations soon. So stay tuned, and we hope you enjoy!

ARYALOKA SANGHA (NEWMARKET, NH)

By Jen Bouchard

As spring rolls in to Aryaloka, we can say goodbye to a fierce winter. It has also been a busy winter and Tuesday night Sangha nights have been hopping! We have seen many new faces every week and the parking lot is at capacity. As more people are coming, the Tuesday night meditation team has been more creative in trying to keep the groups small and interactive. In early March, Aryaloka held its first "Sangha Café" comprised of eight stations where Order members and mitras led twenty-minute question and answer sessions. With close to fifty people in attendance, the evening was quite the success. The team is now trying four classes after meditation – two for people new to Buddhism, and two on more advanced topics.

And the sangha continues to grow as we welcomed Gayle Joyce and Nan Wada on January 25th as new mitras. The ladies had a wonderful ceremony - sharing readings, singing, and tossing rice with family and many sangha friends present. Three hearty sadhus to Gayle and Nan!

Speaking of mitras, the men's mitra group, which is comprised of new and experienced practitioners, have recently completed a study based on Sangharakshita's text *The Bodhisattva Ideal*. They are following this course with presentations and talks given by each member of the group.

The women mitras are broken up into two groups. Amala led one group on the topic of Mindfulness in Depth based on the *Satipat-*

thana sutta. The women studied Sangharakshita's text *Living with Awareness* and the actual sutta. One of the takeaways from this class was the realization that our practice revolves around mindfulness and is grounded in this sutta. Prasannavajri led a second group of women on part one of the Foundation Year material that is on Free Buddhist Audio. The ladies covered what it means to go for refuge to the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. At the end of the ten-week course, several women offered presentations which were a true reflection of how the class has impacted their practice.

NAGALOKA SANGHA (PORTLAND, ME)

By Dh. Dharmasuri

Happy New Year to all from Nagaloka. So Nagaloka Buddhist Center in Portland, Maine, moved into our new spacious location on January 15, 2011. We are now located at 54 York Street, which is much closer to the Portland waterfront. Our new rental space is much larger. We doubled in size from a downtown storefront location to our current space with many windows allowing more natural sunlight. In addition, we have a kitchen, separate room for our bookstore, and common area with separate bathrooms for ladies and men. This enables us to offer weekend day long retreats including a healthy vegetarian lunch made from our kitchen.

Thank you to Bodhana for recently leading a day exploring noble silence and an introductory day on meditation. We really

appreciate Karunasara, Bodhipaksa, and Amala who offered to lead day-long retreats over the next few months. Our program at Nagaloka includes a visit from Parami in June.

Nagaloka continues to grow and develop in Portland, increasing the number of individuals who walk through its door. We currently have a very delightful, lively group of men and women who are very enthusiastic in supporting our little center. We are very grateful to have so many individuals who exemplify sangha, especially in making our move happen. Sadhu! Sadhu! Sadhu!

The second annual weekend retreat for the New York, Boston, and Portland sanghas took place in January at Aryaloka. Entitled *The Living Breath*, this retreat was based on the *Anapanasati Sutta*. This group, coming from all over the Northeast, connected wholeheartedly and practiced fruitfully together.

Jim Jaeger's mitra ceremony took place in February - which was especially nice with his mom, wife, and close friends attending. Currently our mitra count is eleven, with interest from others. Louise Tuski recently asked to become a mitra. Her ceremony will take place in May.

Maitrimani is currently leading mitra study on *Reflection and Meditation*, written by Ratnaguna. Our current study on Friends' Night is the text *Living with Kindness*, which is being facilitated by Maitrimani and Gail. The next four-week introduction to meditation and Buddhism led by Dharmasuri next session will start on April 18th.

Bodhipaksa thought that since we were moving into new, sunny, freshly painted

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SANGHA NOTES

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space, we should update our website too. So, thanks to Bodhipaksa, we have a fresh, new updated website at www.nagalokabuddhistcenter.org. Take a look!

Dharmacharini Dharmasuri*Chairperson, Nagaloka Buddhist Center***BOSTON SANGHA**
(MASSACHUSETTS)**By Dh. Sunada**

In January, the Boston sangha got together with the Portland and New York sanghas for what has now become our annual winter retreat at Aryaloka. We had such a great time last year. And as a testament to that, all but two who came last year came again this year. And many others joined in. So there were twenty-six of us, meditating and exploring the *Anapanasati Sutta* together. The silence was beautiful, and so was the camaraderie.

We don't really know why it works so well to have just the "remote sanghas" retreat together. Maybe it's because we all have to travel to get to Aryaloka, and so we all make a real commitment to being on retreat. Also, we're all from small sanghas,

so we relish the chance to be together with a larger community. Whatever the reason, something magical seems to happen when we get together.

On a different note, it was a year ago - March 2010 - when we had the flood in our Davis Square space. It's hard to believe we've been a nomadic sangha for a full year. But the sangha is still strong, meeting weekly at members' homes. We know it's only a matter of time until we find something good. We saw a really attractive space about a month ago that seemed perfect for us - it was just a block away from our old place. But it fell through. So we'll continue to wait and watch.

NEW YORK SANGHA
(NEW YORK, NY)**By Steve Bell**

The New York City Triratna sangha mourned the loss of Vidyajoyti in December, who often visited and provided a female presence in a small city sangha with only one male Order member. She will truly be missed in the New York sangha, as well as by the Order as a whole and especially the London Buddhist Center, her home sangha. Her audio talks are a wonderful legacy left to us, and you can hear her speak on the topics of Mara and fearlessness online at Free

Buddhist Audio. We send our metta out to Sita, who recently lost her father as well.

Even with ten mitras and five people who have asked for ordination in our community, it is difficult for Vajramati to find support for his Thursday night beginners' class, and sangha night is sometimes not well attended.

People are very busy in New York City, and there's a strong current to swim against in trying to create more time and motivate more involvement.

However, mitras have taken over the practice days every other month, with Faye Simpson and Zachary Nataf combining forces on the first one.

We have discovered social media! Brian Waldbillig has taken on the task from Vajramati, who had been handling it in the past. You can follow our sangha activities on Facebook and Twitter.

Children, inflexible work schedules, and the struggle for existence in America's number one city create excellent but often solitary Dharma practitioners here. And yet there's a surprisingly thriving sangha to which we owe Vajramati a great debt.

We're glad he's back from his sabbatical and glad we could help finance it with our fundraiser that brought a lot of people out of the woodwork to express appreciation. It was quite touching for many to see the outpouring of support and gratitude for Vajramati.

Buddhaworks
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*Your support brightens Aryaloka's future.***Buddhaworks is located at the Aryaloka Buddhist Center**

The Five Levels of Dana Practice

By Marcus Netherton

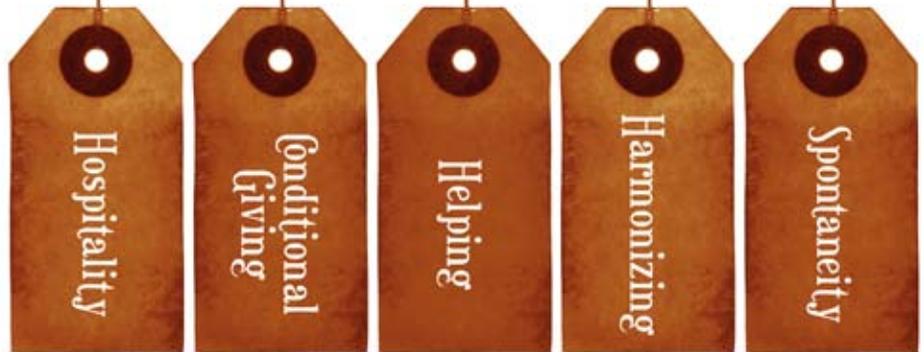
At a recent Men's Day, I had the opportunity to speak about *dāna*. When first asked, I thought, "Sure, I know about *dāna*. I have stood up on Tuesday night Sangha Nights, held up the *dāna* bowl, and said my little spiel about giving. Also I have read and studied about *dāna* in our Mitra classes. I can do this..." Then I began to panic. What do I really know about *dāna*? So I started to research, and of course an easy place to go is to the dictionary, which says:

dāna (Pāli, Sanskrit: *dāna*) is generosity or giving. In Buddhism, it is also the practice of cultivating generosity. Ultimately, the practice culminates in one of the perfections (*pāramitā*): the perfection of giving (*dāna-pāramitā*). This can be characterized by unattached and unconditional generosity, giving and letting go.

OK, now I realized I know about as much as I did before - no new or great insights. I know that *dāna* is the first of the the *Pāramitās* or Perfections. The *Pāramitās* refer to the perfection of certain virtues helping us to live an unobstructed life. Sangharakshita himself says:

In a sense dāna or giving is the basic Buddhist virtue without which you can hardly call yourself a Buddhist.

Dāna consists not so much in the act of giving as in the feeling of wanting to give, of wanting to share what you have with other people. This feeling of wanting to give or share is often the first manifestation of the spiritual life. But why is it the first manifestation? Right away my mind jumped to the eight worldly winds, particularly gain and loss, or craving and aversion. I know for myself, as with most of us, we make many decisions based upon the "What's in it for me?" and "Will I lose out on something?" mentalities. I could hear the voice of my mother in the back of my head, "Marcus, you better share with your brother!" And my reply, "AWWW, mom do I have to?" I would always grudgingly give in. But Bodhisattvas have just the opposite tendency,



giving comes first, and is free and easy. Bodhisattvas give with their whole being. The sutras have many teachings on *dāna*, which I quickly found out as I researched the subject. Still, what I wanted to know was, "What does this all mean and how do I apply it? And does anyone make a pill for that yet?" That is why we are all here right? Well, at least I know that is why I am here. How do I get better and why does this make me better?

Well were do we start? We have The Noble Eightfold Path, the Four Noble Truths, and the Six *Pāramitās* - so of course *dāna* has to have its own list. There are the traditional lists that explain which groups to give to, what is to be given, how it is to be given, and why it is given. In my search for a firmer grasp of *dāna*, and what to say that would shed more light on this practice, I found what I thought was a good list which I think covers all the bases. The list I'm referencing was explained by Ratnaghosa, an Order member at the London Buddhist Centre. It describes *dāna* in five stages:

Hospitality, Conditional Giving, Helping, Harmonizing, and lastly, Spontaneity. Each stage is more advanced than the preceding one, building on the one above it.

Hospitality is the most basic level - we all have had our experience with this, from offering a glass of water, to offering a smile and a kind word.

The second stage, **conditional giving** is where we give something in response to a need, based upon conditions, like buying girl scout cookies, or a Men's Day donation. We know that our gift is tangible.

The third stage, **helping** is where we really start to move into the true heart of *dāna*. Here we begin our move beyond the separation of self and others, and we open up more to other human beings who, like ourselves, share the same wants and needs. In this third stage we have a heartfelt response to recognizing each others humanity. As we grow beyond our own small world, we begin our movement into the real meaning of

DANA

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Movie Review



By Stephen Sloan

“Departures”
(2008), 131 minutes, PG-13
Available on Netflix

This Academy Award winning film (Best Foreign Language Film 2009) tells the story of a young Japanese man, Daigo, who as the film begins is a cellist in a Tokyo orchestra. After the orchestra unexpectedly dis-

bands, Daigo returns to his home town and answers an employment ad for what he thinks is a travel agency. Instead he begins a job preparing the dead for burial. He apprentices with a master “encoffiner” and along the way comes face to face with societal attitudes about death and dying.

This is a sensitive film that raises as many questions as it answers. While not explicitly a Buddhist film, this film explores many themes that will be familiar to Buddhists.

Online In-Site

By Mary Schaefer

NH Chronicle Features Aryaloka

WMUR TV’s New Hampshire Chronicle paid Aryaloka a visit in February. Check out the feature on the station’s website: <http://www.wmur.com/chronicle/26905056/detail.html>. You can also see it on Aryaloka’s facebook page: <http://www.facebook.com/reqs.php?fcode=ab9cb2d49&f=510840307#!/Aryaloka>. Sign on and become a fan.

You will see and hear from our sangha friends, including Amala, Bodhipaksa, Marcus Netherton, Jen Bouchard, and others engaged in meditation, sangha, and discussion.

The feature points out there are about twenty centers devoted to Buddhism across New Hampshire with Aryaloka being among the oldest, having been established twenty-five years ago.

The story shows there is a lot more than meditation – including sangha, festivals, retreats, and study groups – going on here. Friendships are cultivated and lives are transformed.

“People are very interested in Buddhism, because it works,” Bodhipaksa says. “Meditation works, too. It not only makes you happier, but healthier.”

The piece closes with Amala saying: “It helps us connect to something larger than ourselves, something beyond the material



world. Buddhism teaches love and compassion and wisdom, though it really goes beyond any limitations of our immediate struggles. And that’s practical... We don’t leave the world to be Buddhists or to realize its teachings. We work with our lives and with our surroundings, but we bring greater understanding to it. And that’s the transformation process.”

Aryaloka’s website has seen increased traffic since the feature ran, and if you’re around on Tuesday Sangha nights, you can see the center is growing fast. The feature is an excellent testimony to Buddhism and Aryaloka!

Daily Dharma

If you haven’t already done so, check out the <http://www.tricycle.com>. You will find a wealth of Buddhist teachings, readings, discussion groups, and online communities.

A particularly nice feature is the Tricycle Daily Dharma: <http://www.tricycle.com/daily+dharma>. Sign up to receive an email each day that highlights a Buddhist teaching in a short paragraph that serves as a nice mindfulness bell for the day, and invites you to read more if you want to take the time.

Puja Evenings Open Up Practice to the Bodhicitta

By Stephen Sloan

The ritual, the recitations, the ceremony, are all there to support the inner core of the exercise, which is essentially a sequence of devotional and spiritual moods and experiences. If our hearts are filled with sublime feelings of reverence and devotion and worship; if we really feel the distance that separates us from the ideal; if we are truly determined to commit ourselves to

the realization of that ideal; if we clearly see the darker side of our own nature; if we honestly rejoice in the good deeds of others; if we are really receptive to higher spiritual influences; and if we wish to keep nothing back for ourselves alone – then, in dependence on these states of mind, the bodhicitta will one day arise. This is the soil in which the seed of the bodhicitta, once planted, can grow and flower.

~ Sangharakshita
The Bodhisattva Ideal

Each month on the Friday nearest the full moon there's an opportunity to join together at Aryaloka for an experience of devotion and ritual.

Please join us and feel the blessings of the bodhicitta (the awakened heart). We come together at 7 p.m. for meditation followed by puja.

DANA

Continued from Page 6

dāna and the practice of the perfection of generosity. Here is where we begin to use what we have to help create the true conditions for the practice of the Dharma.

Now we move into **harmonizing**, which is the fourth stage. As the name may imply, we begin to fully integrate our higher self as a true individual and begin to use generosity as a skillful means. These are the skillful means a Bodhisattva might use in building a spiritual community. We have become permeated with *metta* and with this *metta* we respond with a desire to create spiritual friendships, which moves us to create and build the Sangha. Now we are in harmony, balancing self and other. Our generosity is expressed through giving encouragement, affection, attention, and rejoicing in the good. At this stage we realize that the Sangha is a creation of all those that come together in harmony, responding to the Dharma to create the conditions for mediation, spiritual friendship, etc. Now we enter into the realm of the Bodhisattvas. Though it is a higher realm of *dāna*, we all have something to give at the stage of harmonizing. Here we create the ideal conditions for living meaningfully - because you cannot help yourself without helping others, and you really can't help others without first helping yourself.

The last stage of **spontaneity** is simply the creative and generous overflow of the internal abundance of an enlightened consciousness. This stage is where the spontaneous giving of the greatest of all gifts

is given, that of the Dharma. To quote the *Dhammapada*:

"The gift of the Dharma excels all other gifts." (Dhammapada 354)

So what does all this mean, and again where do we start? Well, as Sangharakshita puts it, charity starts at home. I am sure most of us at least function at the two basic levels of hospitality and conditional giving. But there is no use in being kind to strangers, the poor, the sick, or the helpless if we can't treat even our own friends and family with generosity and kindness. Just as with the *Metta Bhavana* meditation practice, we start close to home - first with ourselves, then someone close, then a stranger, an enemy or difficult person and then with all sentient beings. I know from my practice I find it hardest to be generous with myself and my enemies most of all. Often I beat myself up for bad thoughts or mistakes, putting an expectation on myself to be perfect, instead of accepting that I am perfectly human. To help us move into the helping stage and beyond we need to receive some of our own *dāna*. As Sangharakshita says:

There is in fact only one need of one's own that has to be fulfilled before one can preoccupy oneself effectively with the needs of others and it is not a physical or material need, but simply a matter of emotional positivity and security. We need to appreciate our own worth and feel that it is appreciated by others, to love ourselves and feel that we are loved by others.

With all of this now in mind I think I must disagree with my first quote from Sangharakshita, in that I think that the most

basic Buddhist virtue is *metta* or loving-kindness. Without *metta*, *dāna* can have very little meaning, as how we give is often as important as giving. For myself, I can remember stopping as I walked outside of a convenience store where a homeless man was asking for money. Digging into my pocket I pulled out a dollar and some change and handed it over, to which he responded "Is that all?" I said, "You ungrateful jerk, give me back my money!" I was angry, he didn't seem the least bit appreciative. For a long time, when giving I expected people to be grateful even if I grumbled. Having always had a truck, I am often one of the first people someone will call on to help when moving. I always helped just to show I was a nice guy, but I hated every second of it and complained throughout the day. So even though I was giving, ultimately the benefits for myself and the recipient were dubious at best, and far from generous.

Attachments are a killer. It is ultimately through our desire to be appreciated and loved for what we do and who we are that we can do the most harm. Through the practice of giving, we can build for ourselves a path of improvement - of fewer attachments to our things and our desired outcomes. We can give freely to ourself, our friends, and our family, without creating the conditions for our own dissatisfaction.

We need to understand our own motivations in giving and work to get to the true heart of *dāna*, and reach the level of spontaneity and liberation from attachments where we know that there is no giver, no gift, and no recipient.

A Simple Cure for What Ails Me

By Mary Schaefer

I recently browsed the magazine shelves of a local CVS, scanning all the promises for quick fixes to whatever ails me in my life. Six choices that will make you happier. Ten minutes to thinner thighs. Flat abs in fifteen minutes. And, fifty ways to seduce a man. If that fails, there's always the old hit song that offers "Fifty ways to leave your lover."

I just wish living a peaceful, pleasant existence was that easy.

When I started studying Buddhism a little more than a year ago, I was a bit overwhelmed by all the teachings' numbered lists on how to achieve enlightenment. There are the Three Jewels – The Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha – to which, as we say in Buddhism, we "go for refuge." There are the Four Noble Truths – a Buddhist teaching that says there is suffering and explains the way to overcome it – yet another numbered practice. There's the Noble Eightfold Path. Then there are lists of what gets in the way of your quest for enlightenment – the Five Hindrances, and even more daunting, the Ten Fetters. And, you can thank Buddha for the Four Exertions and the Four Methods that outline the means to eradicate all those unskillful mental states.

I grew up Catholic. I only remember in that religion the Ten Commandments and the Trinity. Do I need to study and practice all these concepts to find peace? Is there, somewhere in all these teachings, a sure-fire, short-cut way to Nirvana?

I pondered these questions as I perused the fashion magazines' fast-and-easy formulas and studied a reading for my mitra class entitled *The Basic Analysis: Our Disease, and the Prescription for the Cure*.

Is Buddhism really the "cure" for my dis-ease in life? "Can we boil the teachings of the Buddhist tradition down to their essence?" I read. "Can we sum the Dharma up in a single, logical concept or formula, that we can see is clearly true, and base our life and practice on?" A nice thought.

If that were true, I could just imagine the headlines on the cover of *Glamour* or *Cosmopolitan*, touting the glories of Buddhism. "More skillful behavior in fifteen minutes a day," or "Ditch your *dukkha* in five easy steps."

The class focused on a fundamental Buddhist framework – the Four Noble Truths – that deals with the basic problem of human dissatisfaction.

The first truth says "life is suffering." Most of what I do and say as a human, says

the teaching, is associated with my quest to escape from suffering, or what Buddhists call *dukkha*. One type of *dukkha* is having to put up with what I don't like and not getting what I do like. *Dukkha* is the reason I may spend five dollars on a magazine that promises eight surefire ways to look good naked. When I don't like how I look, and want to look better – naked or not – I suffer.

SIMPLE CURE

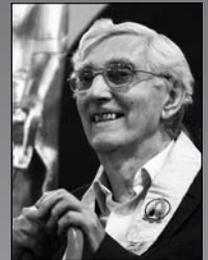
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(Bhante Sangharakshita, Summer 2010)



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RIGHT MINDFULNESS

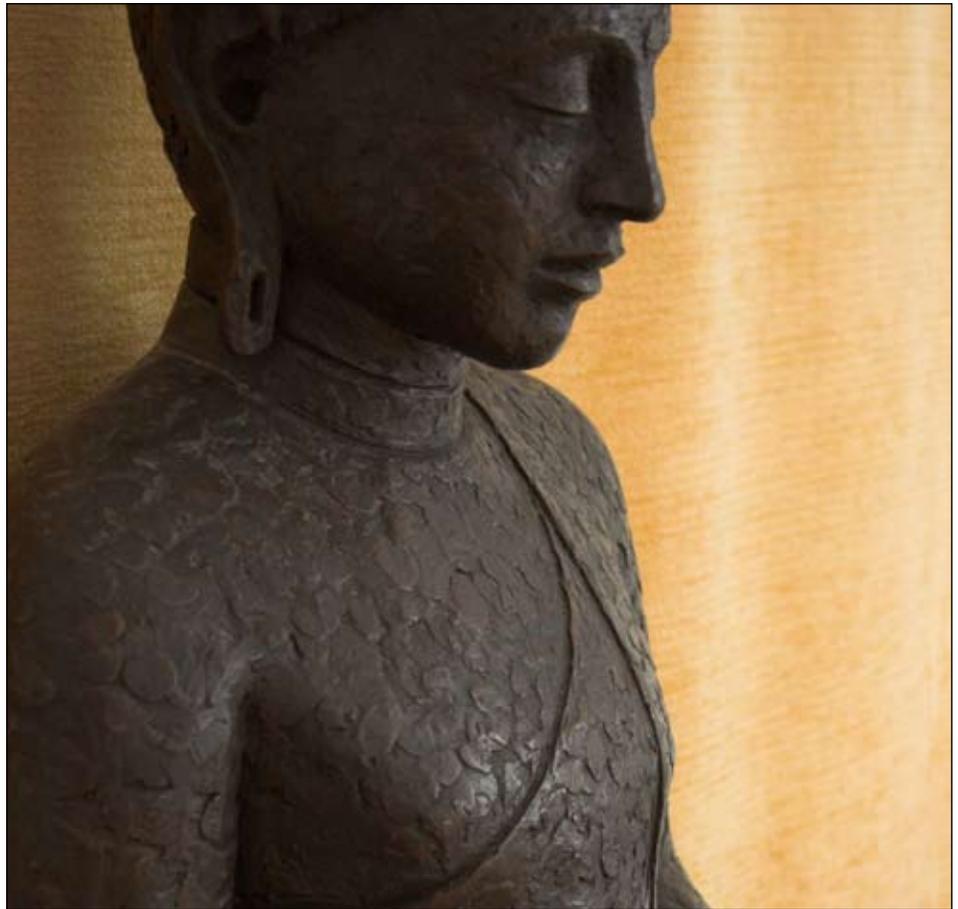
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But how do we really define mindfulness? Though the concept itself may seem familiar, the Dharma reminds us that our concepts and views deserve continual scrutiny and reassessment, especially those that we think we have firmly under our belts. There is always more to be seen. We tend to use the term mindfulness in everyday conversation as a shorthand reference to an intentional focus on the present moment or a faculty of observation. And it is this, certainly. But there are shades of mindfulness that stretch into territory that is far beyond mere observation. Sometimes these shades of meaning simply get missed and may even lead to misunderstandings of what mindfulness entails.

Recently I had a chance to listen to a wonderful talk by Subhuti entitled *Mind and Mental Events*, in which he broke mindfulness down into three facets that, for me, had the effect of deepening my experience of mindfulness as a living force. And in my further reading of an article by Bodhipaksa, a fourth facet came to light, with some clarification of Subhuti's descriptions, which were very helpful. In this ongoing series on the Eightfold Path, we have reached the leg of the journey called Right Mindfulness - or as Bhante Sangharakshita prefers, Right Awareness. So, with these facets of mindfulness as a basis we'll take a closer look, embarking on this stretch of the path with an eye towards defining, and perhaps challenging, our view of what mindfulness is.

Clarity in the Moment: Sati

The first facet of mindfulness is the one that we are generally most familiar with. In Pali, the word is *sati* and the Sanskrit term is *smṛti*. The translation "Right Mindfulness" derives from the Sanskrit *samyak-smṛti*, which literally means "right recollection" or "right memory." This quality of mindfulness is the ability to clearly know what is happening at any given moment and to bring our awareness to a single object of focus. When we practice Mindfulness of Breathing, this is the faculty that we are



cultivating when we bring our awareness to the breath, our body sensations, and our mind's wanderings as they are. The object of central importance in this case is the breath and by bringing our attention back to it over and over we strengthen our ability to maintain our single-pointedness of mind the more we practice this meditation.

After your first several sittings doing the Mindfulness of Breathing meditation practice you may have noticed some very peculiar side effects. You may have had the experience of single-pointedness of mind in other activities of your life. You may find that suddenly projects have gotten easier to accomplish. Your reaction to stress may be much more even-keeled. Your ability to sit still may even have increased. If you've experienced any of these symptoms, don't be alarmed. By strengthening the quality of *sati* in your life, you've begun to pare away the distractions that normally keep you from being in the present moment.

What we're doing here is remembering or recollecting what we're doing, and not

letting all of the other extraneous junk get in the way of it. So, when we have a task to do and we set our minds to it, it's easier to avoid being distracted from the goal that we've set for ourselves. When you think about how many moments in our day are sidetracked by what's on television, or the noise that the neighbor's making next door, or checking our email that fifteenth time, or by the memory of that kid in fifth grade who never picked you for his team at recess, that all really adds up! When you're able to maintain clarity of the moment at hand things become easier because you're no longer wasting so much time on so many distractions.

We are using our powers of concentration to recreate ourselves and develop positively as individuals. In order to do this effectively, we must be able to recollect ourselves - gather our energies together towards a clear seeing of the present moment as it is. This kind of direct engage-

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ment requires real honesty with ourselves and unbiased contemplation so that we can recognize what's actually going on instead of falling into our own preconceived constructs of what the present moment is.

Four Levels of Awareness

In Bhante's teachings on the Four Levels of Awareness, he explains how we should cultivate awareness:

1) Awareness of Things

Awareness of things, or awareness of our environment, means that we actually experience our existence with physical senses. This sounds like something we would obviously do, but really we spend most of our lives never actually experiencing our surroundings. Especially in the modern world with our gadgets and entertainment at the touch of a button, we rarely stop to look at nature, or each other, or ourselves for that matter. A fellow mitra recently made the point that humans have been using their physical senses and feelings to experience the world for thousands of years longer than their intellectual capacity, which is a fascinating thought. Our connection to that raw experience of the world is maybe not so far away.

But we have this deeply ingrained habit of labeling the things of our world to give them some semblance of permanence, and in doing so we allow them to leave our experience, as if they're somehow over and done with in our known universe. It's only when they change drastically and force us to notice their impermanence that we start to wake up slightly and look at them again. Our current trend of global warming is the perfect example of the effects of this tendency to overlook the obvious.

By reconnecting and continually re-engaging with our physical world, by taking the time to appreciate it fully and be truly receptive to it, we create an opportunity to unite with it and respond at a deep level. One of my favorite Buddhist films is the documentary *How to Cook Your Life*, which follows Zen teacher and chef

Edward Espe Brown through retreats on cooking and Zen. In a strikingly memorable scene, Brown was deeply and visibly moved reflecting on the teapots in his kitchen - all banged up and raw, covered in dents, but still serving their purpose. He marveled at their willingness to continue on despite it all, holding water and giving of themselves to warm and satisfy others. I think this is a beautiful example of the kind of engagement and meaning we can derive from the things in our world which we may never give a second glance to, which may even seem downright unaesthetic on their surface.

2) Awareness of Self

In talking about being aware of our self, we include our **bodies, feelings, and thoughts**.

* **Body** - When we're aware of the body, we'll notice how we hold ourselves, our gesturing, our posture, and our physical actions. Our actions will naturally become slower and more deliberate as mindfulness is applied, but because things are done with more awareness they will be completed more smoothly.

* **Feelings** - Awareness of feelings means paying close attention to our emotional states as they arise and pass away. As we work with feelings mindfully and continue to progress, we'll find that unskillful states will become easier to handle, and fade away sooner. We may begin by recognizing when an emotional state has already come up, then the next time we may realize when it is present, then as it arises, and finally we may be able to prevent it from needing to arise at all.

* **Thoughts** - In a similar manner to feelings, when we apply the lens of mindfulness to the stream of thought that runs continually through our minds, and work with our mental states to cultivate skillfulness and clarity, eventually the mental dialogue will subside and we'll understand the arising and passing of thoughts.

In genuine awareness of self one

doesn't become slow for slow's sake, or spend a ton of time ruminating on mental states and body sensations at the expense of being mindful of other aspects of one's life, or in a way that affects others poorly. As Subhuti puts it in his talk, "It's no good focusing on your mental states if you can't turn up on time." However, it's also very important to honor the actual needs of one's body and surroundings. Your body and your environment are supports to your practice, and you will suffer if you don't take time to care for them. So here it's important to find the Middle Way.

3) Awareness of Others

To be aware of others is to treat everyone as a person, not as an object in your universe. From your significant other, to your mother and father, to your friend, to the guy who picks up the trash on Tuesdays, to someone halfway across the world whom you may never meet - every single one of us has hopes, sufferings, joys, thoughts and all the other myriad common experiences of life. We're all on our own individual trajectory.

Mindfulness of another is the giving of your attention and time and consideration. It's eye contact and smiles, maybe random hugs (these are my favorite). It's listening with an open heart. To really hear someone is to be fully absorbed in their words, expressions, voice inflections, body language, their subtle energies. It's a receptiveness to another as a spiritual being as well - called *darshan* in Sanskrit, the seeing of something holy in another. *Namaste*, a beautiful gesture in yoga practice and an approximation of this sentiment, is loosely translated as "the light in me sees the light in you." The *metta bhavana* practice is a wonderful way to work on awareness of others and to generate an imaginative understanding of the people in your life, as you break down the views and barriers that habitually divide one person from another.

4) Mindfulness of Reality

It all comes down to this, really. Di-

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rect experience and contemplation of Reality with a capital “R” - as it is, no mental filters applied. Mindfulness of Reality is where we continually remind ourselves to see with the inner eye of Wisdom. Here we come face to face with the Three Lakshanas - impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and the lack of a permanent self. We try to remain aware of the workings of *prattīya samutpāda*, or conditioned co-production, in our lives.

There are several methods that can help one maintain focus on Reality. I often find myself returning to the Three Lakshanas as a reference point, and when I’m able to experience things on this basic level it brings me abruptly back to my central purpose of Going for Refuge. It reminds me what I mean to do in each moment and to stop wasting time with my delusions.

Bhante mentions other methods of recollection that aid in cultivating mindfulness of Reality. In Recollection of the Buddha one contemplates events from the historical Buddha’s life as well as imagining his spiritual qualities. Through this exercise one gains a better understanding of the qualities of Enlightenment. Recollection of *Sūnyatā* practice reaches beyond concepts and imagination, into the depths of raw experience of the Void. It would be difficult to use this effectively without a properly deep grounding in meditation practice. The reciting of mantras is another method used frequently as a way to stay connected to one’s awareness of Reality throughout the day.

Continuity of Awareness: *Sampajañña*

The second facet of mindfulness, *sampajañña*, is translated as “clear comprehension,” or “discernment.” This is different from the more observational aspects of mindfulness that we’ve been discussing. It has much more to do with the intellectual processing and analytical assessment of our experience, bringing our interpretation of our experience into alignment with reality, and is an important piece of the mindfulness puzzle.

So, through our focus and concentration on body, self, others, and Reality we have the raw data of experience. Now what do we do? How is that incorporated into our lives? *Sampajañña* is the ability to take that raw data, process it by comparing it against your past experience and your future intentions, and put it in its proper moral and spiritual perspective so that it aligns with your deep purpose. This is the aspect of mindfulness that includes past and future, not just present moment experience. You look mindfully at how your short-term goals and your long-term goals match up and make appropriate changes to achieve the results that will align most closely with your spiritual values.

This may sound very dry and rigid, but it really requires quite a lot of intuition as well. All of us have some experience of intuition or deep knowing - an inner pull in a specific direction. Sometimes we may not even understand why, or where it comes from. Given two choices we may have an undeniable sense that one direction is the correct one even though the other seems much more logical. My own experience is that the longer one practices, and the more one is able to listen to these subtle cues, the closer one feels to the flow of life. There is hidden within each of us a voice that somehow seems to deeply know the right path for us if one is quiet and patient enough to hear it.

Sampajañña helps us to follow the path laid out by our inner voice by discerning the appropriate opportunities and efforts that will allow that path to come to fruition. It takes the information derived from our experience of the present moment and ties it together with where we’ve been and where we are hoping to go. This faculty helps us to see how our seemingly mundane activities fit into the grander scheme of Going for Refuge. It applies a greater perspective so we are not only mindful about what we are doing, but *why we are doing it* in each moment. It helps us gain clarity about how best to align with our purpose. And it provides a link between sitting practice and practice off the cushion, unifying the two, eventually helping to create a state in which life is the practice, all the time.

Without the *sampajañña* aspect to our

practice of mindfulness we may wander about with no central purpose. We may have intuition and a deep dedication to the Three Jewels, but without the appropriate means and efforts to direct this intuition we may miss opportunities to grow spiritually.

Care and Responsibility: *Appamada*

The third facet of mindfulness, *appamada*, is translated as “non-recklessness,” “care,” “concern,” or “responsibility.” This is the absolutely vital, strongly ethical dimension of mindfulness that keeps us vigilant about the arising of unskillfulness in ourselves. The quality of *appamada* contributes a strong sense of responsibility for one’s actions and their consequences. One loves, desires, and is attracted to skillful action and repulsed by unskillful action. Think of *appamada* as the Guardian of the Gates, giving you a choice between skillful action and unskillful action.

This sense of responsibility extends to the importance of what one is undertaking in the spiritual life. If you’ve made the commitment to follow the Dharma, you take care to do it to the best of your ability. *Appamada* keeps us on target spiritually so we don’t drift away from our values

Implied in *appamada* is a sense of responsibility and care for others and an attention to ethical behavior in your interactions with them. You aren’t reckless with other people’s emotions or irresponsible with your speech. You’re careful not to take from others what is not given - and this includes much more than just possessions. To the best of your ability, you don’t impose your unskillful mental states on others. And your own responsibility for maintaining clarity in your own practice so that everyone benefits.

Sometimes one witnesses in oneself or in others a tendency towards being mindful in terms of the observational facet of mindfulness, but lapses in practice of ethical behavior or application of discipline. Without ethical practice and a sense of responsibility and importance about what

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you're doing, mindfulness is incomplete. I've noticed in myself that when this equation is out of balance and my ethics or rigor are off, it affects my ability to maintain mindfulness in its other facets as well. *Appamada*, the Guardian quality, helps me to question how moral my actions are in the moment or how strongly I'm sticking to my practice and reminds me to check myself. Confession is also a very helpful practice to help strengthen the quality of *appamada* and to keep one vigilant about ethical transgressions.

Categorization: Dhamma-vicaya

The last facet of mindfulness I'll mention is *dhamma-vicaya*, or "investigation," which places our experiences into categories or provides labels to help us work with them more efficiently. The application of permanent labels to things is usually something to avoid, but the use of dynamic structures to better understand our experiences is an invaluable tool to sort out what is helpful from what is not helpful.

One of the best known of these structures is that of the Five Hindrances, which lays out a comprehensive set of five categories that our distracted mind will generally

fall into during meditation – restlessness, torpor (sluggishness), doubt, craving, and hatred or ill-will.

When practicing meditation mindfully, an unhelpful mental state may arise that falls into one of these five hindrance categories. As it arises, one mindfully finds the appropriate category to describe it and lets it pass. By doing this, we remove the power of these mental states to continue to distract us, and we can move on to cultivate focus.

Well-Rounded Mindfulness

So, as we can see, mindfulness is much more than merely being attentive. Whole-hearted mindfulness involves qualities of being present with our experience, contemplation, analysis, discernment, intuition, alignment with our central purpose, responsibility, ethics, and the use of practices and structures that serve to strengthen and refine these qualities. It is commitment to practice and to the Three Jewels. We continually return to the Three Jewels as a litmus test for what we are doing with our lives.

Mindfulness is not simply observation, it's also the application of focus and energy towards appropriate means that will meet the requirements of our spiritual path, and a continual reflection on our actions to de-

termine whether they are living up to our spiritual ideals.

When seen in this way, mindfulness becomes an undertaking that absorbs not just certain moments of our lives, but our whole lives. This expansive and multifaceted definition opens up new opportunities to practice mindfulness, and perhaps reveals areas of our practice that deserve more scrutiny in terms of how mindful we are in reality. For me, looking at these three facets of mindfulness feels more organic, and incorporates qualities that seem to genuinely align with how it actually works in my own practice when it's working optimally. I hope that you find value in it as well.

Reference Materials:

The Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path by Sangharakshita

Eight Mindful Steps to Happiness by Bhante Henepola Gunaratana

Mind and Mental Events (Subhuti 2001) - Talk 9 by Subhuti <http://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=OM804>

Mindfulness and the Mind by Subhuti <http://madhyamavani.fwbo.org/8/mindfulness.html>

Four Dimensions of Mindfulness by Bodhipaksa <http://www.wildmind.org/mindfulness/four/dimensions>

SIMPLE CURE

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The second truth says that *dukkha* is caused by my cravings and my attempt to get happy by grabbing for anything that will satisfy them. This grasping for satisfaction actually causes me more suffering. Even if I did get sexy hair and glowing skin, I still wouldn't feel fulfilled. "True fulfillment comes from our inner being," the reading says, and "not from our outer circumstances."

The third truth offered me hope. Yes, I am ill – or dis-eased, it says. And yes, I am making things worse by my behavior, but the teaching says there's a "cure." I can go beyond suffering and dissatisfaction by changing the conditions of how I live, by "transcending our narrow vision of life, and

living in a more open, expansive way."

The fourth truth tells me the way to do this – The Eightfold Noble Path. Maybe, in the language of *Cosmopolitan*, it would zap my cravings in Eight Noble steps. Ah, here I thought, is the formula for peaceful living. If I followed this progressive path of spiritual development, I read, every aspect of how I live my life would change. That seemed like a pretty tall order in my book – even more far-fetched than thinner thighs in ten minutes.

Yet, in these weeks and months of studying the Dharma, participating in the Sangha and practicing meditation, I am finding my vision expanding and my cravings easing – at least some days, even if only for a few hours at a time. It is working.

In some ways the formula is easy. I just

have to, as the great philosopher Nietzsche says, "overcome myself." Sangharakshita, our wise teacher who founded the Triratna Buddhist Order, adds that Nietzsche, however, neglected to offer any practical instructions on how to do that. It's unlikely he'd make the cover of *Glamour*.

Buddhism, on the other hand, Sangharakshita points out, has many methods, exercises, and practices for overcoming oneself. I'm less daunted now by all the lists, and delight in the wisdom of the teachings and the guidance from those who show me plenty of evidence that these "cures" work.

I might not end up with another lover or thinner thighs or look good naked, but I'll have peace of mind and that is good for all that ails me.

Arts at Aryaloka

Reading, Writing, and Renga

Notes on the Mindfulness and Poem-Making Retreat

By Mary Schaefer

Nine Sangha members took a break from shoveling snow on February 20th to read poetry, collect words, and assemble poems at Aryaloka. The session was part of an ongoing effort to bring the arts alive at Aryaloka by offering contemplative art experiences.

Lin Illingworth, a southern NH poet and creative writing teacher, joined Dh. Saddhamala to lead a snow-free Sunday afternoon of contemplative words, ideas, and meditations in a class entitled *Mindfulness and Poem-Making*.

The class wove together guided meditation and writing meditation to lead us to “new places and rediscovered landscapes, within and without.”

Following an opening meditation with

Saddhamala, Lin had us collect words and phrases from our life experiences. We read poems and explored different styles of poetry. She then guided us through a number of exercises to draw on our inspiration and “word banks” to build different types and forms of poems.

“I found using patterns of form, sequences of lines and words useful. The structure made it easier for me to organize something,” said Sangha poet Joan Rochette.

Others agreed. “I liked making a ‘word bank’ for further inspiration,” said Shana Clark, “and I loved being introduced to various rules and poetry styles.”

One exercise using lines of five, seven, and five syllables “was a pretty great exercise,” said Jay Normand. “I’d come to the workshop needing a new rhythm in my

writing. That helped a lot. It was like when a chef taught me the secret chef’s way of chopping onions. Now I can get work as an onion chopper anywhere. If that exercise continues to help me chop poems like I do onions, I will be even more grateful than I am now.”

We concluded the day with writing a renga. Renga, as I understand it, is an ancient Japanese form of shared writing – a fitting form for a Sangha. We collectively wrote rengas incorporating different stanzas of five and seven syllables.

“I liked the surprise, appreciation, and acceptance by everyone,” said Ellen Chulak, “regardless of how it turned out.”

Lin is a skilled, enthusiastic and knowledgeable poetry lover, writer, and teacher.

READING, WRITING, Renga

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A Look Ahead at Upcoming Arts Events

By Dh. Kiranada

The seasons change and we mindfully witness all that this brings to our lives. A severe and prolonged winter with overwhelming snow hits New England; on the other side of the world, quakes open the ocean floor, tsunamis take villages, nuclear disaster threatens... while soft rain falls on green rice fields in Bali on this day of silence. We clearly see our wide connections. As new sprouts rise from the New Hampshire forest floor, we reflect. We hold all life precious... and stay present.

Bhante Sangharakshita reminds us of this presence, this mindfulness, and also how the arts can bring awareness to our lives, “invigorating our practice, refining our emotional lives and opening new ways

of experiencing our meditative states.”

In the next six months Arts at Aryaloka offers a number of special day retreats and events that will include music, movement and the visual arts.

Saturday, June 4th, will bring us the Silk Tones Concert, an a capella chorus that has delighted us before. This will be an enjoyable evening to share with family and friends, full of music and chocolate delights. What more could you want in June? See Sunada’s article for more.

Sunday, July 10th, will give us more contemplative arts with *Fresh Ink; Flowing Water* - a day to drop expectations and move with the ink across the page, with Dh. Kiranada’s encouragement.

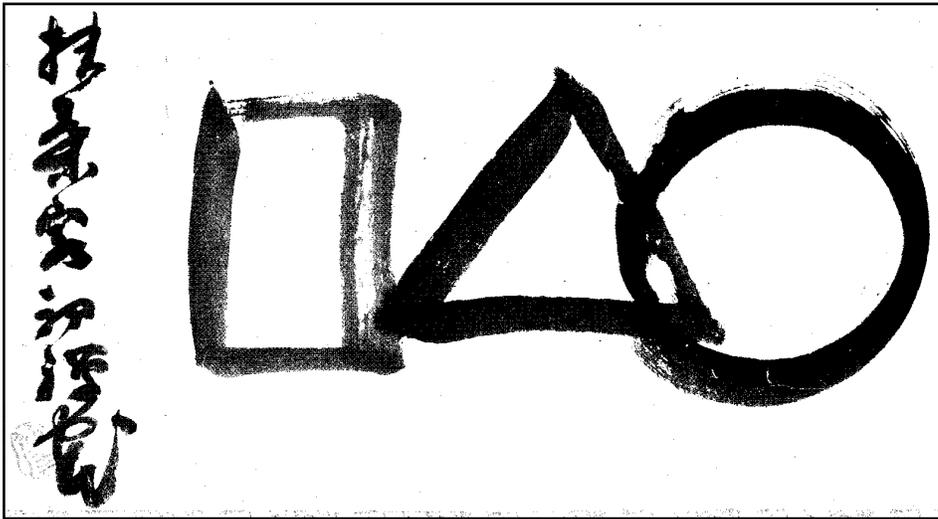
In early August the Tibetan Drepung Gomang monks from India will join us for

a week, building a meditative sand mandala at our center. There will be a schedule available soon listing more special events during this week. On Sunday, August 7th, they will offer a morning of Tibetan Arts, including mani painting, butter sculpture, and sand mandala painting.

And on Saturday, October 8th, we welcome more contemplative arts with Dawn Kramer of Mass. College of Art leading us in a day of movement and video.

A full and rewarding six months of art. Come join us and make art a part of your contemplative practice and your exploration of positive emotions. Call the Aryaloka office to register for these events at (603) 659-5456. With much love and anticipation I’ll be coming home soon from the Bali rice fields.

Arts at Aryaloka



Contemplative Arts ~ Fresh Ink, Flowing Water

By Dh. Kiranada

On Sunday, July 10th, we will spend the day in both meditation and contemplative use of ink and water. Working with a deep sense of letting go of self, self criticism, judgement, evaluation, and even accomplishment, we will move clear water and fresh black ink across the white page. This is not a sumi-e class, not a calligraphy class, and not an ink painting class, but it might be part of all of these.

There are no beginners or talented artists in this process, only those wanting to “rest in the line” as we explore what ink on paper feels like. We may paint the walls, do automatic mantra writing (eyes closed!), learn

some Japanese kanji symbols, or other exciting possibilities.

Please leave your expectations home and bring your beginner’s mind, adventurous being, and your desire to relinquish self. We will supply the materials of paper, brush, and ink. Limited space, pre-enrollment needed, so call the office to sign up soon. The event takes place on Sunday, July 10 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. The fee is \$60 plus a \$7 materials fee. Vegetarian lunch is included.

Dh. Kiranada is the fearless leader. She teaches at Mass. College of Art and Design and usually moves hot wax across silk rather than ink across paper. But she’s enthusiastic about contemplative arts, line, and ink too, and will share some of her insights.

READING, WRITING, RENGA

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My own poem-writing phobia dissipated with her assurance that we are all poets. She describes the path of meditation as “be present, pay attention,” and conversely, poetry as “be present, pay attention, write it down.” Following the session, she said, “Everyone brought full presence and open hearts to the workshop, so the writing that followed had resonance.”

Saddhamala, a long-time poetry lover, wanted to bring Sangha members together in a new way. Years ago, she led a “study” on poetry on Sangha nights where she used Sangharakshita’s book, *The Religion of Art*. Art, like religion, he says, challenges our perceptions, awareness and experience of the truth.

Some participants are interested in continuing to make poems and write. “What I most hope will come from the day,” Joan said, “is an ongoing writing group of some kind, open to others in the sangha.” Stay tuned.

If you are interested in cultivating your ability to make poems, Lin suggested these websites that offer a variety of creative writing prompts and connections:

- * <http://www.davidrm.com/thejournal/tjresources-exercises.php#poetry>
- * <http://totallyoptionalprompts.blogspot.com/>
- * <http://www.nhwritersproject.org/>

Check the “Poetry Corner” in this issue for poems that resulted from this session.

The Silk Tones: An Evening Song and Chocolate Delights

By Dh. Sunada

For our next Arts at Aryaloka event, we’re delighted to have the Boston-based Silk Tones back for an encore performance. With seven voices - and no instruments - they fill the air with rich silky harmonies, jazzy rhythms, and a whole lot a fun. And

our own Dharmacharini Sunada is among them.

They have an evening planned that’s sure to put a smile on your face. There’s everything from Billy Joel and Sting, to jazz standards, do-wop classics, Broadway favorites, and all manner of songs both serious and nutty.

And as further enticement, we’ll have a buffet spread of delectable chocolate delights.

An evening not to be missed!

Date: Saturday June 4 at 7 p.m.

Admission: \$20

All proceeds go to benefit Aryaloka

Two Reflections on Fixing Samsara

Dancing in the Freedom of Dharma's True Nature

By Dh. Viriyagita

“Why do we stay in prison,
When the door is so wide open?
Move outside the tangle of
fear-thinking
Live in silence.
Flow down and down in always
Widening rings of being.”

~ Rumi

We stay within our prison walls when we try to fix *samsara*. We seek safety, security, predictability, pleasure, control, and certainty - perhaps even a fixed self and permanence. I would suggest that in some fashion we came to Buddhism thinking or feeling that treading the path would be about finally possessing these things. It is deep within our human nature to need and seek these ultimately false values.

I am not going to dwell, however, on this aspect, because I would suggest that we were also drawn to what lies on the other side. We had a glimpse, a sense, a resonance with our inner knowing, a vision, some experience that we simply could not put down that allowed us with great courage to take leaps into the unknown. What do we feel when a leap into the abyss is required? For me it is a definite visceral experience of both fear and excitement, a rush, the thrill of freedom.

Now, this sense of what is on the other side can be a result of a spontaneous experience, perhaps while quite young. My initial vision was at age nine or ten, staring into the night sky while lying down in the back seat of our family car on a long drive. I looked up at the stars and for the first time in my life I had a sense of something beyond the limits of my known experience. I felt insignificant in the vast universe - a small speck really - and at the same time

I felt connected and incredibly unique. It was an experience that I called “knowing” something and it is that taste of a limitless spaciousness and freedom that has dominated my searching ever since.

Secondly, we have the capacity to imagine freedom, wisdom, and limitless compassion. What we can imagine, we can bring into being. In the course of my life, particularly after coming in contact with Buddhism, I have played and imagined. My son and I took the car to be fixed and wandered around pretending we had lost everything and had no car, no home, no place to go. What we both experienced was a release, a sense of freedom.

At about that same time I delivered a paper route every Friday night. I would walk about in the sometimes cold weather, outside of the cozy, warm homes and I would imagine myself to be a wanderer again, without a home, and it was not despair I felt, but an exhilarating sense of freedom.

We can also cultivate stepping into the gap of unknowing and have the experience of hanging upside-down. We can do that by looking very hard and carefully at what we habitually cling to. Do we think of ourselves as a particular kind of person? Challenge these fixed notions. As an experiment try doing things very differently. If you always sit facing the door, sit with your back to the door. If you always say yes, say no. If you always sit several seats away from someone, sit close to the same person at the next event. Do you always structure your day, every minute? Leave it wide open. Life gives us these moments without us seeking them out but I propose we invite them quite intentionally. My most profound experience of this practice occurred on the island of St. John where I planned to take a week totally for myself. However, I stepped immediately into my habitual pattern of being manipulated by someone else's needs. A very needy and negative woman attached herself to me and wanted to do all sorts of programs together. I stopped myself and said: “I'm taking this week as I planned,” and I proceeded to decline. Again the act of stepping outside the

prison of my habitual patterns was freeing. I was able to let go in a very total way. I let go of having to fix the next moment so that everything would be all right. And in that letting go, everything was perfect just as it was, just as it unfolded. Instead of experiencing me as selfish, others found me more spontaneous, more giving, whereas previously I had been tight and withdrawn.

We can also focus intensely and ask ourselves the question, “What is on the other side?” It's like climbing a mountain and you are frightened of the height, or looking into a deep ocean and you are afraid of drowning. My son once said to me that it feels very safe at the beginning of a mountain climb because you are surrounded and feel protected by the trees, but once you get near the summit it is just a vast, expansive space - and what a view. We can focus on that fear or we can look to the view. I think the spiritual life is like that, the more you climb, the broader the view.

I was listening to a talk by Ratnaguna on Reflection and I was impressed with this quote by Marilyn Robinson: “I have wandered to the limits of my understanding many times and I have scared myself a good many times. Leaving all landmarks behind me, or so it seemed. It has been among the truest pleasures of my life, night and light, silence and difficulty. It seems to me always rigorous and good.”

What this really means is that the spiritual life requires heroic effort. Much as it seems that the cozy spot next to the fireplace is where it's at - it's more likely the cold, exhilarating, bracing slide down the ski slope, or the lonely flight high up in the sky, or the jump into the abyss. There is really only one thing we can rely on - Dharma's true nature. So no matter what, we need to seek it courageously, fearlessly, and not shrink back from the starkness of its truth.

When I was on my ordination retreat (the second one) and was meditating with my preceptor, Sanghadevi, I overcame an essential fear I had carried around with me

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DHARMA'S TRUE NATURE

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for a long time. I held myself back in meditation because I had a great fear of losing my usual sense of my self (due to an experience many years ago). I allowed myself to take that leap (feeling supported by the presence of my preceptor, my *yidam*, and the Buddha) and I broke the bonds of

my limited meditation experience. I had a glimpse of the other side and I know that the View is the most important reliable focus of one's life.

As said in the *Ratnagunasamcayagatha*, *In Dharma's true nature alone he is standing, then that is his practice of wisdom, the highest perfection* - *the clear bell of freedom sounding out in the darkness.*

So:

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.

The Inner Terrain of Samsara

Falling Into the Soup and Unable to Get Out

By Dh. Prasannavajri

I give heartfelt gratitude to Sangharakshita for his invaluable contribution to our understanding and practice of the Dharma. I also extend a deep appreciation to Maitreyi for her article entitled, *The Dangers and Defects of Samsara*, which has inspired my experience in a rather profound and insightful way.

This talk is dedicated to the words of Santideva from *The Bodhicaryavatara*:

"The Awakening Mind should be understood to be of two kinds; in brief; the Mind resolved on Awakening and the Mind proceeding towards Awakening. Even in cyclic existence great fruit comes from the Mind resolved on Awakening, but nothing like the uninterrupted merit that comes from that resolve when put into action."

Last month I worked on a fairly comprehensive application in which part two asked of me to provide "A reasonably full account of your life." The thought of it made me tired right on the spot. The challenge of being older is similar to walking into a room of dusty file cabinets and having to sort out life experiences scattered throughout numerous file drawers. The task took several weeks and the semblance of a part-time job.

I was the second of five children, born to parents whose family lineage stemmed from the province of Quebec, Canada. If one were steeped in French Canadian culture, it also meant that for generations, one's

family was inescapably Catholic, produced well-cultivated workaholics, and gave rise to exquisite, beautiful, crystallized views of guilt and sin, or, sin and guilt. So this is the soup I landed in, filled with vegetables and hefty broth all generated from a 100 percent, calorie-loaded, *samsara* base.

Time for true confessions: For aeons, I have been swimming in circles in one kind of soup or another. More recently in this life, I became part of the Triratna Buddhist Community and as a mitra thought I was getting places because I could swim laps in my soup. Time goes by, I'm strongly engaged in the ordination process and think I am really making spiritual progress because I plow through the *samsara* veggies with my backstroke. Then, just a couple of years ago, I am ordained into the Triratna Buddhist Order. Now, I feel I'm entering spiritual depth because I've learned to scuba dive in my soup.

Every day, every moment, we carry the same dream-like illusion, that these various efforts to navigate through *samsara* offer a means to actually climb out of it, to climb out of the roots of unskillfulness and propensity for self-judgement, criticism of self and of others.

In *Meaningful to Behold*, Geshe Keltsang Gyatso insightfully wrote:

"Since beginningless time self-grasping has never been separate from us, not even for a moment. We thus have strong familiarity with anger, attachment, and all manner of distractions, and little power to oppose them."

St. Paul expresses a similar theme when he writes:

"The good that I would, I do not; but

the evil which I would not, that I do."

While preparing this talk, I had a flashback from either the second or third grade in parochial school. I was listening to the nun talk about devils, those being who were fallen angels from heaven. These fallen angels make it their mission to tempt and cause man to sin. I recall reflecting on this problem and in my eight- or nine-year-old mind I thought I came up with the perfect solution. I would pray for devils to become better. If devils became good, people, I concluded, would also become good. We are compelled, no matter what age, to develop strategies to fix or manage *samsara* so as to minimize pain. Maitreyi mentioned in her talk, *The Dangers and Defects of Samsara*:

"...nothing is solid and substantial and nothing can be fully relied upon. We want the world to be substantial and secure and it isn't, and this causes us suffering."

In her work, *When Things Fall Apart*, Pema Chodron brings a certain clarity to this issue:

"Believing in a solid, separate self, continuing to seek pleasure and avoid pain, thinking that someone out there is to blame for our pain, one has to get totally fed up with these ways of thinking."

Being totally fed up is more than being deeply frustrated. It is deciding to put an end to blaming others for our unhappiness. It is seeing clearly that our strategies for managing the inner terrain of *samsara* don't work, and actually have never worked. It does not matter how hard we try, *samsara* is not fixable, yet our creativity knows no

Poetry Corner

Untitled

By Dh. Saddhamala

at the grocery store
moving slowly
like the lapping waves of the pond
by the shore
of my sunlit cottage

they had their own quiet rhythm
no hurry
a slow motion dance
perfected
by years of practice

he picked up a tomato, red and ripe
she nodded
he placed it in their basket



Untitled

By Shana Clark

Sunlight warm and bright
Flows through my window, I smile
Welcoming its light.
Sky; cloudless, blue, inviting.
Oh how I envy
The birds floating, hovering
Cold winter air lurks
Outside. The sun promises
Summer is coming.

Wood Piles, March

By Jay Normand

Wisdom of the body
All winter my body has said, "This
is enough for now.
Be good, and cautious always,

like a pilgrim."
Coming home

I notice the last few shadows
kneeling in the wood stack,

the snow
in short sleeves

like the girls in town.

"Bring me to the ground," it says,
Burn me to the grass."

Mixed Cord
By March
the wood pile's
soft

as cedar
and pine.

A few rounds
of ash

and oak

at the bottom
that burns

when you've tried
to forget.

Conversant lights
What I like though
is how the sun warms
in converse
to the last few fires;

watching light
flex its half dreamt wings
in the curtains,
and Spring's clear desires.

INNER TERRAIN

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bounds in trying to mold it into something
permanently pleasing.

If Santideva were here, he might say,
"Wake up and get out of your soup!"

Sangharakshita reminds us of the real-
ity in which we live and practice, and that
we have the opportunity to truly wake up:

"Our everyday life may be pleasurable

*or painful; wildly ecstatic or unbearably
agonizing; or just plain dull and boring
much of the time. But it is here, in the midst
of all these experiences, good, bad, and in-
different - and nowhere else - that Enlight-
enment is to be attained."*

(Sangharakshita - *A Stream of Stars*)

I close with the beautiful words of wis-
dom and encouragement from the *Ratna-*

guna-Samcayagatha:

"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 gen-
tle Buddhas,

Taught for the weal of the world, for he-
roic spirits intended!"

UPCOMING

Continued from Page 20

- 18** Intro to Buddhism and Meditation, 7-9 p.m.
- Bodhipaksa
- 19** Women's mitra class
- 20** *Full-Moon Puja and Meditation, 7 p.m.*
- 20** Women's Mitra Weekend
- All About Buddhas!, 7 p.m. - Amala
- 23** Men's mitra class
- 24** Sangha Night, 6:45 - 9:15 p.m.
- 25** Intro to Buddhism and Meditation, 7-9 p.m.
- Bodhipaksa
- 25** *Aryaloka Council 6:15*
- 26** Women's mitra class
- 30** Men's mitra class
- 31** Sangha Night, 6:45 - 9:15 p.m.

JUNE

- 1** Intro to Buddhism and Meditation, 7-9 p.m.
- Bodhipaksa
- 2** Women's mitra class
- 4** Order Day
- 4** Silk Tones Concert, 7 p.m.
- 5** Family Hike
- 6** Men's mitra class
- 7** Sangha Night, 6:45 - 9:15 p.m.
- 9** Women's mitra class
- 10-12** A Humble Heart yoga retreat, 7 p.m.
- 12** Intro to Meditation - Lovingkindness,
10 a.m. - 4 p.m. - Samayadevi
- 12** Family Hike rain date
- 13** Men's mitra class
- 14** Sangha Night, 6:45 - 9:15 p.m.
- 17** *Full-Moon Puja and Meditation, 7 p.m.*
- 17-27** Noble Silence meditation retreat, 7 p.m.
- Bodhana, Narottama, Karunasara

- 20** Men's mitra class? - location TBA
- 22** Aryaloka Council, 6:15 - location TBA
- 26** Men's Practice Day, 7 a.m. - location TBA
- 27** Men's mitra class
- 28** Sangha Night, 6:45 - 9:15 p.m.

JULY

- 1-3** Order Weekend - Parami
- 5** Sangha Night, 6:45 - 9:15 p.m.
- 10** Contemplative Arts Day
- 12** Sangha Night, 6:45 - 9:15 p.m.
- 15** Full-Moon Puja and Meditation, 7 p.m.
- 15-17** Retreat with Nagabodhi
- 16** Order Day with Nagabodhi
- 19** Sangha Night, 6:45 - 9:15 p.m.
- 22-23** Concord Sangha Retreat
- 23** Rental in the domes
- 26** Sangha Night, 6:45 - 9:15 p.m.
- 28-31** Open Heart, Quiet Mind yoga retreat, 7 p.m.

AUGUST

- 1-7** Drepung Gomang Monks' Sacred Arts Tour
- 19-26** Abiding in Ease, Here and Now - Summer
meditation Retreat, 7 p.m. - Bodhipaksa

Policy for Retreat Deposits:**Retreats/Classes/Solitarities**

Those registering for retreats (including solitarities) and classes of any length will be asked to pay a minimum deposit of one-half of the total cost to finalize registration. If a registrant cancels two weeks or more before the retreat, s/he will receive a credit of the full amount toward another event. If the cancellation is received less than two weeks before the event, the registrant forfeits half of the retreat fee, and the remainder may be credited toward another event.

Yoga Retreats

Those registering for yoga retreats will be asked to pay the full cost in advance in order to finalize the registration. If a registrant cancels two weeks or more before the retreat, s/he will receive a credit of the full amount toward another event. If the cancellation is received less than two weeks before the event, the registrant forfeits half of the retreat fee, and the remainder may be credited toward another event.

***** *Note: In all situations, special circumstances will be taken into consideration.* *****

Upcoming Events

(All events are subject to change. For the latest up-to-date information, check our website at <http://www.aryaloka.org> or call the office at 603-659-5456.)

(Akasaloka events are in italics.)

APRIL

- 23 *Pratitya Samutpada - The Key to the Universe class, 10 a.m. - Vidhuma and Candradasa*
- 25 Men's mitra class
- 26 Sangha Night, 6:45 - 9:15 p.m.
- 27 Intro to Buddhism and Meditation six-week eve. series begins, 7-9 p.m. - Bodhipaksa
- 27 *Aryaloka Council 6:15 p.m.*
- 28 Women's mitra class
- 30 *Living as a River book discussion, 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. - Bodhipaksa*
- 30 Rental in the domes

MAY

- 1 Young Sangha and Parent Discussion

- Group, 10 a.m. - 12 p.m.
- 1 Order Day 12 - 5 p.m.
- 2 Men's mitra class
- 3 Sangha Night, 6:45 - 9:15 p.m.
- 4 Intro to Buddhism and Meditation, 7-9 p.m. - Bodhipaksa
- 5 Women's mitra class
- 6-8 Rental in the domes
- 7 *Intro to Meditation - Mindfulness, 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. - Narottama*
- 8 *Men's Practice Day*
- 9 Men's mitra class
- 10 Sangha Night, 6:45 - 9:15 p.m.
- 11 Intro to Buddhism and Meditation, 7-9 p.m. - Bodhipaksa
- 12 Women's mitra class
- 14 BODHISATTVAS AT PLAY - WORK DAY, 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.
- 15 BODHISATTVAS AT PLAY - WORK DAY, 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.
- 16 Men's mitra class
- 17 Sangha Night, WESAK CELEBRATION, 6:45 - 9:15 p.m. - Vidhuma

UPCOMING

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Ongoing

Sangha Night at Aryaloka

Every Tuesday evening, 6:45-9:15 p.m.

- Led by Amala, Arjava, and Suzanne, et. al.
- Open to all
- Fee: Suggested donation \$10 per class
- No registration necessary

Typically, our Tuesday night activities include:

- 6:45 - Gathering, tea and announcements
- 7:00 - Meditation and shrine room activity
- 7:45 - Study, discussion or a talk on the evening's topic
- 9:15 - End

With all of the activities, you are free to participate or to just sit and listen. Nothing is compulsory. If you have any questions, please ask!

Full Moon Puja

Friday evenings as scheduled (unless noted). See the Aryaloka website or Vajra Bell events schedule for dates and locations. 7:00 p.m. meditation, followed by puja.

The rich devotional practice of meditation and puja is shared on these special Friday nights by those who find devotion an important part of their practice.

When we celebrate the Sevenfold Puja, which combines faith and devotion with poetry and sometimes an element of visual beauty, we find that our emotional energies are to some extent refined. When this happens, it becomes possible for the vision and insight of the higher thinking center to act through these refined, sublimated emotional centers directly on the moving center. In this way, the whole of life is completely transformed.

Sangharakshita ~ Ritual and Devotion