

SUMMER 2011

# vajrabell

*keeping sangha connected*

## Right Concentration

Exploring the Jhanas with Bodhipaksa

Aryaloka to Host

Tibetan  
Monks'  
Tour

Sports

& the

Spiritual Life

by Stephen Sloan



This issue of the Vajra Bell is one of transitions. To begin with, as you've no doubt noticed, the newsletter itself has been reborn in a new form, with a new look. Yes, even our

newsletter is subject to ongoing change!

After a two-year-long stretch, we complete the end of our series on each limb of the Eightfold Path with a wonderful article by Bodhipaksa on the *jhanas* (*dhyanas* in Sanskrit) and Right Concentration. From here, we'll move on to a new series in which we'll take a closer look at each *jhana* and, in conjunction explore one of the Five Hindrances - a hearty journey into meditative experience.

We also have an extended update on some of the new changes and developments in the Aryaloka Council, and a request for your input on how those changes will express themselves in the wider sangha. With our sangha expanding and deepening at such an accelerated rate, this is a great opportunity to be a part of how the future will look at our beloved center. If you have a few moments to participate in the upcoming Council

survey, it will be rewarding for all.

Our wonderful and dedicated volunteer staff at the *Vajra Bell* kula has seen some change too, with a redefining of our working roles. Beginning with this publication each of us will now focus on a particular area of the newsletter content. So if you have an idea or a submission, please do let us know! You can find the appropriate point person to the right of this page. By the way, if you're a photographer, would you care to join the Vajra Bell kula?

With all this change there are still many things that remain constant, like the fantastic array of pieces in the arts section. From event recaps to poetry to upcoming events, there's lots happening. Sangha Notes continues to expand to incorporate updates from other centers in North America. We hear this time around from New York City and the Concord sangha.

Stephen Sloan contributes a wonderful article springing from a personal visit with Sangharakshita on how a love of sports and the spiritual life can coexist. And there's a sneak peek at the upcoming Tibetan Monks' visit to our center in August.

So much to enjoy in this issue! So sit back in the sun with a glass of lemonade and a copy of the *Vajra Bell* and take a nice deep breath of summer.

## musings from the chair || Dh. Dayalocana



In June of this year two hundred and fifty teachers from many Buddhist traditions came together at Garrison Institute in New York for dialogue about the future of Bud-

dhism in the West.

In our time together, through careful listening to one another, we increased our understanding and respect for each tradition. We formed connections that will assist our efforts to bring the Three Jewels to the people of the West.

I found there was interest and willingness to engage in dialogue as we explored together the possibilities and the concerns for the future of Buddhist teaching and practice in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. We shared concerns about depth and breadth

of practice. We talked about finding time for inner personal practice while living in a world with great needs for the support and wisdom of the Dharma. We discussed societal concerns - violence and militarism, climate change, social action, grief work, and how to be effective teachers in the modern world.

As we learned from one another we also offered support. We saw the importance of connection among the Buddhist traditions as we work to share the Buddha's compassion and wisdom as an offering to the modern world.

I encourage each of us to take some time to think about strengthening our inner practice and to reflect on how and where that will be expressed in the world around us.

May there be peace and harmony, and may we carry the light of the Dharma for the benefit of the world.

# vajrabell

[www.aryaloka.org/category/vajra-bell](http://www.aryaloka.org/category/vajra-bell)

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## from the council

A warm welcome to our three new Aryaloka Council members: Shrijnana, Eric Wentworth, and Brian “Jumbo” Jervis. They join Dayalocana, Tom Gaillard, Amala, Arjava, Vihanasari, and Akashavanda on the governing board of the center. Please feel free to contact any of them with your ideas and suggestions.

As our restructuring continues, we have now divided Council members into five working teams: Spiritual Vitality, Administration, Finance, Facility, and Devel-

opment. This last, newest team will be involved with publicity, marketing, and fund raising.

Information about the work of the teams and the much-appreciated involvement of other sangha members appears below, and more will be available soon.

The following guideline was approved for teaching mitra study: “Mitra study shall be taught by Order members. If an Order member is unable to teach a particular mitra class session, he or she shall find

a substitute Order member or postpone the class. Alternatively, the Order member could suggest that the class engage in other activities such as meditating together, doing a puja, or sharing a potluck dinner.”

The Council also voted to offer space for dance and language classes offered by the local Laotian community. These classes will not interfere with center activities.

Visitors are welcome at Council meetings. Please contact Dayalocana to make arrangements. ~ Dh. Vihanasari

# Growing Pains and Gains

## Responding to Aryaloka's Future

These are very exciting times at Aryaloka. The standing-room-only crowd on Tuesday Sangha Nights clearly indicates we are attracting even more people who want to learn about and live the Dharma. Since celebrating our 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary last September, we have experienced both the blessings and challenges of our growing sangha.

### Taking a Long Term View

Having anticipated this growth, the Aryaloka Council began last spring taking a long-term strategic view of our organization and planning for this next chapter that Aryaloka is entering. The Council is a central governing body made up of sangha members responsible for the policies and administration, programming, and upkeep of the Center and, most importantly, the spiritual well-being of our community.

We started by revisiting Aryaloka's vision and mission, which is to create the best possible conditions in which to explore and practice the Buddhist spiritual path. On a practical level, we had to examine how we ran and supported the Center as it grows while, at the same time, maintaining and supporting our original purpose as a spiritual center where we teach and share the Dharma. We needed to create sustainable systems and processes to enable consistency and transparency that

transcended individuals, allowing for an easier transfer of roles over time.

### Realigning Roles and Responsibilities

One of the results of this effort is a re-configuration of the Council from a single central working and governing body to a wider networked structure. This includes a governing group supported by five Council Teams that focus on addressing specific areas required to run Aryaloka efficiently. The teams are aligned with the different kulas – volunteer groups of Sangha members who carry out specific duties for the Center. The Teams are currently defining and clarifying the roles and function of each of these groups. The idea was to increase efficiency and gain clarity regarding who needed to be involved in specific functions.

Aryaloka is run primarily by volunteers. Our goal is to use people's time as efficiently as possible and share the work more widely throughout the Sangha. Much was already in place and simply needed to be assigned to specific teams.

The Council Teams have made tremendous progress in identifying and recruiting members for their kulas and defining roles. These are the Council Teams and their areas of responsibility:

*continued on page 18*

## We Need Your Two Cents and Two Minutes!



The Aryaloka Council would like to know how it can do a better job of keeping you informed about the Center and its different activities. Look for an email very soon from us with a link to a survey asking for your input and ideas. It will be quick and easy, and will help us better understand what you want to know about the Center and the sangha, and how we can best provide that to you. As a Council, our goal is to ensure that everyone in the sangha is supported in their practice and that together we foster and cultivate a vital, spiritual community. To achieve this, we believe good communication is essential, and we encourage and look forward to your participation.

*With metta and gratitude,*  
**The Council**



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The Aryaloka Council minutes are now posted on the bulletin board at the foot of the stairs.

# sangha notes

## ARYALOKA SANGHA (NEWMARKET, NH)

### Face painting gratitude

A hearty thanks to Sangha members who offered their face painting talent at the recent Market Square Day in Portsmouth. Proceeds from the day went to support Order members who facilitate the women's Going for Refuge (GFR) retreat this summer and also the newly-developing Portsmouth Meditation Center. The volunteers were very dedicated as it rained most of the day.

### Nagabodhi retreat and visit

Nagabodhi, a senior Order member who lives in the UK and who is president of Aryaloka, will return to the Center this July. Nagabodhi will lead a retreat from July 15<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> at Aryaloka called *From Stress Management to Transcendental Insight: Putting Conditionality to Work*. What is conditionality? And how can an understanding of it help us to live happier, fuller and richer lives? Explore the answers in this retreat. For more details, check out the website. During his stay in New Hampshire, Nagabodhi is happy to meet with sangha members if his schedule permits.

### Our Sangha grows

Two sangha members became mitras – which means spiritual friend – in a special mitra declaration ceremony on May 24<sup>th</sup> at Aryaloka. Three sadhus to our newest mitras: Christine Shorey from Durham and Lauren Magee-Baldi from Exeter.

### Spring hike at Pawtuckaway

Some sixteen sangha members enjoyed perfect warm, dry spring weather for a hike to the top of South Mountain in Pawtuckaway State Park. The children particularly liked climbing to the top of the fire tower at the summit. Watch for details of another hike in October. The autumn hike will be longer and more challenging, and hopefully the weather again will be perfect.

### Sangha night discussion

Three rounds of discussion are underway on Tuesday nights, and will continue into early August. They include:

(1) The Noble Eightfold Path, for newcomers and people wanting to learn basic

Buddhism, led by Arjava and friends.

(2) Dharma Topics and Tools for Living, also a fundamental level discussion for people just getting started, led by Suzanne Woodland and Kiranada. It includes topics such as conditionality and the three characteristics of conditioned life – impermanence, insubstantiality, and the presence of unsatisfactoriness.

(3) The Threefold Way: Ethics, Meditation, Wisdom – a very practice-oriented approach with small group discussion and sharing of personal experience led by Amala and friends.

### On becoming a mitra

There will be a four-week class on becoming a mitra held in late July and early August, led by Anilasri and friends. See the website or call the Center for details. The class will provide an overview of what it means to be a mitra (friend) in the Triratna Buddhist Community and will help people as they consider whether they would like to commit themselves to being a Buddhist and to practicing more deeply in this community. Taking this class can simply be an exploration or can help one decide if one wishes to become a mitra.

### Mitra study for the summer

The women's mitra program will continue through the summer with Thursday evenings on the Aryaloka porch. Programs presented by Order members will explore being together in the Dharma, generosity, silence and solitary retreats, spontaneity and friendship, patience, practical ethics, the value of devotional practice, and one segment entitled *Ask Not What the Dharma Can Do for You, But What Can You Do for the Dharma*.

The men's mitra group has just completed a study module on sangha and spiritual community, the third of the Three Jewels, from year two of the Dharma Training Course for Mitras. The material was very thought-provoking, and the new format adopted for the men's mitra group, in which two men present the week's material to the group and direct discussion, aided in making the study additionally engaging for all.

The men move on to their next module on conditioned co-production and the Middle Way for the summer months. This will be an opportunity to really explore

what are, in essence, the core teachings of the Buddha.

### Mitra study for the fall

This fall the women's mitra study program will offer three programs beginning in September. The first, taught by Karunasara, is *The Nature of Existence II – Buddhist Visions of Reality*, which looks at various models of reality found in the later Buddhist tradition. The second, taught by Vihanasari, is *The Threefold Path Part I – Ethics*. It is an introduction to Buddhist ethics, followed by a look at each of the five precepts in turn. *Ethics, Year 1* will be taught online with Saddhamala.

~ Mary Schaefer

## NEW YORK SANGHA (NEW YORK CITY, NY)

The Triratna NYC Sangha welcomes Sally Richards, from Nottingham, U.K., and John O'Connell, from Dublin, Ireland. Sally recently completed her Ph.D. and is staying in New York on a three-month sabbatical. John is an artist and Mitra from the Dublin Centre, participating in a six-month fellowship. John's work can be seen at Location One on 26 Greene Street in Manhattan until July 29<sup>th</sup>.

On Monday evenings, Sangha Night continues to feature a series of talks by Sangharakshita on the *Vimalakirti Nirdesa Sutra*, originally delivered in London in 1979. The talks have prompted a number of lively discussions on topics such as the mystery of human communication, the way of non-duality, and history versus myth. (The talks are available on Free Buddhist Audio.) ~ Brian Waldbillig



John O'Connell with some of his works.

**CONCORD SANGHA**  
(NH STATE PRISON FOR MEN - CONCORD)

There's always a chance to break down wrong view whenever attending an event with the Concord sangha and the retreat held on March 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> was no different. The theme of the retreat was *Sangha and Spiritual Friendship*.

For those of us tagged "volunteer," the themes might have seemed familiar, but a different perspective emerged from looking at these two emphases of the Triratna Buddhist Community through the eyes of the "residents."

The retreat began as usual on Friday night but the larger than usual turnout was an indicator that this retreat would not be just the same old thing. There were readings on the topic of sangha and a group discussion. It was clear that there was a high level of energy in the room – energy felt by volunteer and resident alike.

Saturday morning continued on the same high note as the retreat gathered mo-

mentum. For this volunteer, a clearer view of the difference in viewpoint between volunteer and resident came when after lunch we broke into small groups for discussion. As we considered the question "What keeps us from forming spiritual friendships?" it became clear that friendship in a prison environment is a lot more risky than it is in the relative comfort of the Aryaloka Buddhist Center.

In prison, trust is something that can only be developed slowly if at all. The prison culture favors accumulation of anything that might give you an advantage in the future, including confidences made to a supposed friend. Risk is somewhat limited in the supportive environment of Aryaloka, but even the slightest hint of weakness could have significant consequences in the prison environment.

It's not uncommon in our society for people to question the humanity of those in our prison system. "Why don't they just pull themselves up by their bootstraps and snap out of it?" one might hear asked. It's not until one shares just a bit of prison

life that one sees the weakness of that logic. Life in prison is fundamentally different for the most part, and one can't generalize on the basis of experience outside of prison about what "should" go on within the walls. For this volunteer, it became clear that while I can see myself as just the same as all the men in the Concord sangha, my conditions for practice are quite different.

The importance of conditions is not the first wrong view that I have had the opportunity to confront during my tenure as a volunteer. I'm regularly challenged to adapt to new situations. There's always a need for new volunteers at the prison, so if you think your practice (or your self-view) could stand a challenge or two, why not join the Concord sangha? If your experience is anything like other volunteers, you'll find yourself getting as much as you give and the men of the Concord sangha will gain another chance to connect with the outside world. Hope to see you there.

*For more Concord information, contact Bodhana at [bodhana@myfairpoint.net](mailto:bodhana@myfairpoint.net)  
~ Stephen Sloan*

## Aryaloka Finances Depend On Your Generosity

As we head into the summer months, it's a good time to ask ourselves how Aryaloka is doing from a financial perspective. In this brief article we'll review the year so far, and look at what the sangha can do to make sure our spiritual home has the firm financial foundation to support our thriving Buddhist practice!

I'm pleased to report that Aryaloka is in pretty good shape. Your Council approved a budget that allowed for prudent financial expenditures and still accomplished breakeven results. Through May we were on track to achieve those goals.

The three pillars of our operations are dana, retreats, and programs. Retreats generate 35% of our budgeted income, and dana provides another 25%, through pledges from the Mandala of Supporting Friends and generous individual donations. We rely on programs (Sangha night, Mens' and Womens' Days, etc.) for an additional 22%. The bookstore is another important element, providing 10% of income.

Our income from each of these,

through May, is slightly ahead of budget. Great news!

As for expenses, almost half our income goes to compensate those who administer the center and spread the Dharma through Aryaloka's many teachings, retreats, and programs. Facility expenses, including our mortgage, utilities and the like, are another one-third. Through May our expenses were running slightly ahead of budget- mostly because of higher than expected heating and plowing costs. Thank goodness the cold months are behind us! Our crowded Tuesday Sangha nights prompted us to purchase more meditation supplies, which is money well spent. And the Council just approved pretty hefty fees for squirrel-proofing our two buildings, which means the local flying squirrel population will need to seek the Dharma less directly than through our walls.

Overall, our financial situation is stable – but as our sangha grows, so too do the demands on our finances. Please, take a moment to review the programs and retreats, and help your practice and Aryalo-

ka by attending these wonderful events! And this fall, you'll hear about our annual pledge drive. Please mindfully consider increasing your current pledge, or pledging monthly support for the first time! Through your generosity, the Aryaloka sangha will continue to thrive, with innovative, creative offerings that challenge and inspire. Thank you for your support!

*~ Tom Gaillard, Treasurer*

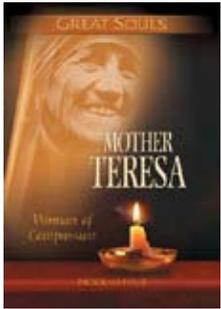
### For Your Information...

#### TRIRATNA CENTERS IN THE U.S.

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New York City, NY  
Missoula, MT  
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**Great Souls: Mother Teresa**  
(2002), 56 minutes, Not Rated  
Available on Netflix

For the sole purpose of helping poor people, Agnes Gonxha Bajaxhiu left her home town of Skopje, Albania at the age of eighteen. She made her way to the



poorest part of Calcutta where she dedicated herself to people in need.

Over sixty years later, as Mother Teresa, she was still helping the poor for "the love of God." She never saw her family again.

Mother Teresa was clearly a different kind of person.

She is a revered holy person in India and the Catholic Church has beatified her. From the Buddhist perspective, was Mother Teresa a Bodhisattva?

*Great Souls: Mother Teresa* is a dramatic account of the life and works of Agnes Bajaxhiu (born August 26th, 1910 and died September 5th, 1997), a woman who seemed to have exhibited an ideal balance between wisdom and compassion.

With footage from Europe and India, this film begins with a powerful account of Agnes's early years – from her youth in Macedonia and her first "call to serve the

poor" to WWII Calcutta when, as sister Agnes, she taught in a cloistered school for girls.

Director Tom Ivy uses interviews from people who knew Mother Teresa, footage and images from the streets of Calcutta, interviews with theologians and scholars, and video of Mother Teresa herself to tell the story of how she left the comfort of her cloister and overcame tremendous adversity to establish a new Catholic order. This new order, the Missionaries of Charity, was devoted to "wholehearted and free service to the poorest of the poor." Through her work and constant, single-minded devotion to serving those in the greatest need, the person of Mother Teresa became THE symbol of servant-hood in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

This is a gently told story of a dear woman with an open heart. She had a calling to live solely for the sake of the poor, the destitute, the dying, and those who had no one else to help them. In an interview, the aging Mother Teresa compares the state of being unwanted with a disease: "For all types of diseases there are medicines and cures... but for being unwanted, except that there are willing hands to serve them and there is a loving heart to love them, I don't think that this terrible disease can ever be cured."

There is something about any account of Mother Teresa that pulls at anyone's heart strings. My youngest son,

Inle, was intrigued as I worked on this review. I restarted the film for him and this busy eight-year-old watched, entranced, for the full hour. Later in the morning, after having been reprimanded by his sister, I heard Inle say, "Well, I'm not Mother Teresa."

This film will not leave you on the edge of your seat but it will leave you asking what it's like to experience what young Agnes Bajaxhiu seems to have experienced an awakening of the Bodhi heart. Sangharakshita tells us that Bodhicitta is not an act of will but rather that Bodhicitta "takes possession" or "arises" in a person. Did young Agnes undergo this profound spiritual experience?

In considering the Bodhisattva Ideal, I can't help but marvel at what the arising of Bodhicitta might look like in the life a person.

I think that Mother Teresa offers an endearing example: one of selfless and pure goodwill toward others. Her experience of love and compassion seems to have filled her entire being and flowed into every action of her life.

In this hour-long film, the *Great Souls* series offers a captivating introduction to the person, works, and history of Mother Teresa of Calcutta. *Great Souls: Mother Teresa*, released in 2005, is available for \$13.95 on Amazon and can be streamed on Netflix.

~ Daniel Bush

## Buddhaworks

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If many years ago I hadn't read *A Guide to Walking Meditation* by Thich Nhat Hanh, I would probably not be writing this for Aryaloka Buddhist Center today. This book was a gift from Deborah, my sweet wife, because she knew that this Zen master might be someone who could change suffering into happiness, and confusion into clarity.

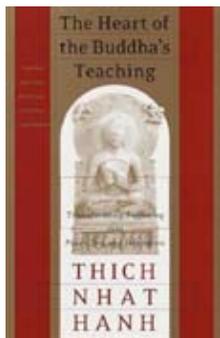
So it was over twenty years ago that I was introduced to Buddhism and the beautiful simplicity of the Dharma. We had spent an afternoon at a Buddhist center near Ukiah, California, in the 1990s and then, after moving to New Hampshire, discovered Aryaloka thanks to Suddhayu or Amala sending a press release to the newspaper about an *Introduction to Buddhism* class.

The bookstore has always carried Thich Nhat Hanh titles, but I felt it would be a good idea to showcase some of his books in this issue of the *Vajra Bell*. Please take a look and pick up one or more of these treasures from Vietnam's great gift to humanity.

### The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching

By Thich Nhat Hanh

"Loved around the world for his simple, straightforward explanation of Buddhism, Thich Nhat Hanh has finally turned his hand to the very core of Buddhism and



conundrums such as this. In the traditional way, Thich Nhat Hanh takes up the core teachings one by one – the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, the Twelve Links of Interdependent Co-Arising – but his approach is as fresh as a soft breeze through a plum orchard. For illustration, he dips into the vast stores of Buddhist literature right alongside contemporary anecdotes, pointing out subtleties that can get glossed over in other popular introductions. He also includes three short but key sutras, essential source teachings from which all Buddhism flows. Studying the basics of Buddhism

under Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh is like learning basketball from Michael Jordan."

~ Brian Bruya

### Living Buddha, Living Christ

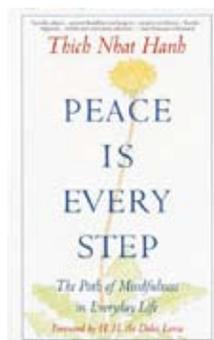
By Thich Nhat Hanh

Buddha and Christ, perhaps the two most pivotal figures in the history of humankind, each left behind a legacy of teachings and practices that have shaped the lives of billions of people over two millennia. If they were to meet on the road today, what would each think of the other's spiritual views and practices? In this classic text for spiritual seekers, Thich Nhat Hanh explores the crossroads of compassion and holiness at which the two traditions meet, and he reawakens our understanding of both.

### Peace is Every Step

By Thich Nhat Hanh

"As the Zen teacher Richard Baker commented, Thich Nhat Hanh is 'a cross between a cloud, a snail, and piece of heavy machinery.' Sooner or later, it begins to sink in that

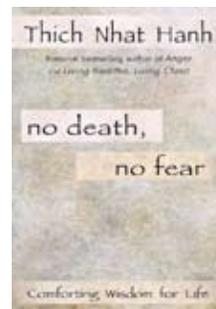


Thich Nhat Hanh is conveying a depth of psychology and a world outlook that require nothing less than a complete paradigm shift. How can we mindlessly and selfishly pursue our individual ends, when we are inextricably bound up with everyone and everything else? We see an enemy not as focus of anger but as a human with a complex history, who could be us if we had the same history. Suffice it to say, that after reading *Peace Is Every Step*, you'll never look at a plastic bag the same way again, and you may even develop a penchant for hugging trees." ~ Brian Bruya

### No Death, No Fear

By Thich Nhat Hanh

"In *No Death, No Fear*, Thich Nhat Hanh succeeds once again at reducing a complex subject into a simple Buddhist



teaching. Many of us would rather avoid the troubling subject of death. They observe that this is because we are afraid we will become nothing when we die. If we believe we cease to exist when we die,

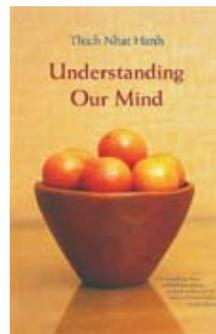
he says we are not looking deeply enough into death.

Death teaches us valuable lessons about impermanence and the interconnectedness (or "interbeing") of all things. In his characteristic style, the Vietnamese monk uses metaphors and simple illustrations to reveal that our human life is just a temporary manifestation, much like a wave on the ocean or a signal transformed into a song on the radio. By looking deeply into the everyday world in which we are interconnected with everything else, we may experience life without the fear of death."

~ G. Merritt

### Understanding our Mind

By Thich Nhat Hanh



This profound look at Buddhist psychology offers important insights into how Buddhism's ancient teachings apply to the modern world. Basing his work on the writings of the great fifth-century Buddhist master Vasubandhu and the teachings of the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, Thich Nhat Hanh focuses on the direct experience of recognizing the true nature of consciousness. Presenting the basic teachings of Buddhist applied psychology, he shows how the mind is like a field, where every kind of seed is planted — seeds of suffering, anger, happiness, and peace. The quality of life, he writes, depends on the quality of the seeds. By learning how to water seeds of joy and transform seeds of suffering, understanding, love, and compassion can flower.

~ Stephen Cardwell

# Tibetan Monks Tour: Sharing the Dharma Across Space and Time

From August 1<sup>st</sup> through 7<sup>th</sup> Aryaloka will host a group of eight Tibetan monks from the Drepung Gomang Monastic College in South India. The monks will offer a wide range of ritual and cultural activities during their stay with us. There will be opportunities for people of all ages to observe the monks and experience the rich Tibetan Buddhist heritage through ritual, arts, and ceremony. There will be much to see, from the creation of a sand mandala to hands-on workshops and a cultural "pageant."

This will be the second group of Tibetan monks who have visited Aryaloka. In 2008 a group stayed with us from the Drepung Loseling Monastery, also in South India. The Gomang and Loseling monks are both part of the large organization of the Drepung monastery. A bit of history might help understand the "collegial" relationship between the two groups.

## The "Nalanda" of Tibet

"Drepung Monastery, near Lhasa in Tibet, was founded in 1416 by Jamyang Choge Tashi Palden (1397–1449), one of Tsongkhapa's main disciples. Drepung was the principal seat of the Gelugpa school of Tibetan Buddhism. Drepung was known for the high standards of its academic study, and was called the Nalanda of Tibet, a reference to the great Buddhist monastic university of India that thrived from the 6<sup>th</sup> century, C.E., to the 12<sup>th</sup> century, C.E.

"Drepung is now divided into what are known as the seven great colleges: Gomang, Loseling, Deyang, Shagkor, Gyelwa or Tosamling, Dulwa, and Ngagpa. It can be a somewhat useful analogy to think of Drepung as a university along the lines of Oxford or the Sorbonne, the various colleges having different emphases, teaching lineages, or traditional geographical affiliations."

There has been a fifty year history of destruction of the monastic buildings and torture, killing, and oppression of monastics by the Chinese government in Tibet. Many monks fled Drepung and all parts of Tibet, and continue to do so, since 1959 when Tibet came under Chinese government authority. According to local sources, today the population at the monas-



tery in Lhasa is about 300 monks, due to population capping enforced by the Chinese government. However, Drepung has continued its tradition in exile with campuses in South India on land in Karnataka given to the Tibetan community in exile by Indian Prime Minister Nehru in the 1960s. The monastery in India today houses over 5,000 monks, with around 3,000 at Drepung Loseling and some 2,000 at Drepung Gomang. Hundreds of new monks are admitted each year, many of them refugees from Tibet.

## Sharing Dharma through the Arts

Buddhism fully merged into Tibetan culture around the 7<sup>th</sup> century, C.E. The arts and rituals of Tibet have been dedicated to Buddhist practice for over a thousand years. With the monks' visit we have a wonderful opportunity to connect to a deep tradition, a language of ritual and symbol that reaches beyond specific place or time, which may awaken in us a deeper motivation for our own practice.

The arts we will see in August are traditional, that is, they follow patterns and methods in use for centuries. These are not "individual" arts, such as we are accustomed to in the West. The forms carry a spiritual message, rather than personal expression. About the sand mandala, the Drepung Gomang site says: "Sand painting is an ancient Tibetan art form. The Sacred Sand Mandala is carefully constructed from dyed sand particles to represent the particular esoteric, textual traditions of Buddhism. It is a transient art form, thought to have originated in India and been transferred in the middle ages to Tibet. The sand mandala is constructed as vehicle to generate compassion, realize the

impermanence of reality, and a social/cosmic healing of the environment.

"Millions of grains of colored sand are painstakingly laid into place on a flat platform over a period of several days, forming an intricate diagram of the enlightened mind and the ideal world. The most common substance used in the creation of dultson-kyil-khor is colored sand, which is ground from stone. Other popular substances are powdered flowers, herbs or grains. In ancient times, powdered precious and semi-precious gems were also used. Thus, lapis lazuli would be used for the blues, rubies for the reds, and so forth. When finished, to symbolize the impermanence of all that exists, the colored sands are swept up and poured into a nearby river or stream where the waters carry the healing energies throughout the world."

Aryaloka is happy to extend hospitality to help support our brothers in the Dharma. Groups of monks from Drepung tour the United States for several months each year in order to raise funds for the monastic colleges in India. Our own tradition, the Triratna Buddhist Community, is young in comparison with the centuries-old institutions of Tibetan monasticism. We are bringing Buddhism into the modern world in different ways. Yet we are devoted to the same Dharma, the same principles of wisdom and compassion, the same desire to develop spiritual understanding and care for beings. We are delighted to share our space with the visitors and to learn from their offerings.

Please come as often as you can to the events at Aryaloka during the week of August 1<sup>st</sup> through 7<sup>th</sup>. It is sure to be a rich and inspiring experience to be in contact with Buddhist practice as expressed through ritual art.

For further details and a complete listing of all the events please see the Aryaloka website: <http://www.aryaloka.org/2011/04/11/drepung-gomang-monks-sacred-arts-tour/> or telephone 603-659-5456. ~ Dh. Amala

(sources: *Drepung Monastery* – Wikipedia; *Gomang History*; [http://www.gomang.org/2010\\_tour.html](http://www.gomang.org/2010_tour.html) – click on Visual Arts Programs)

A friend recently had a major birthday, and as a gift I assembled a collection of meditations for her to use. What better gift than that of peace and practice? It prompted me to hunt for meditations and dharma talks that I could download online. Here's a collection of some I've found, thanks in large part to Stephen Sloan for these suggestions.

#### Free Buddhist Audio

<http://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/>

(Hint: search for meditation)

This, of course, is at the top of the list and a site you should be familiar with if you're not already. The site has a rich collection of dharma talks, including several on different types of meditation including Metta Bhavana and Mindfulness of Breathing. You can also download bells and guided meditation for both of these practices, long and short versions with appropriately spaced ringing of the bells.

#### Dharma Seed

<http://dharmaseed.org/talks/>

(Hint: search for meditation)

Dharma Seed is dedicated to preserving and sharing the spoken teachings of Theravada Buddhism in modern languages. This website makes guided meditations and talks freely available for download or streaming as digital audio files (MP3s). New recordings are being added continuously from contemporary dharma teachers, both those well-known and those still known only to those who have attended their retreats.

#### Suttareadings.net

<http://www.suttareadings.net/audio/index.html>

This site is a library of free audio recordings of English translations of Pali suttas, selected and read aloud by respected Dharma teachers within the Theravada

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

Thank you!

Buddhist tradition. "The Dhamma has always been essentially an oral tradition," says the site owner John Bullitt, so he invites you to "download these readings, settle down in a quiet place with your laptop or iPod, close your eyes, rest your attention lightly on your breath, and open your ears. Imagine yourself in a peaceful forest setting on a warm day, sitting under the cooling shade of a tree, as the Buddha himself takes a breath and begins to speak."

#### Zencast

<http://www.zencast.org/category/Guided%20Meditations>

Another site rich with dharma talks and guided meditations.

#### Buddhanet

<http://www.buddhanet.net/audio-meditation.htm>

A collection of talks and guided meditations by Buddhist teachers of various traditions.

#### Wildmind

<http://www.wildmind.org/>

This is our own Bodhipaksa's site, which offers a practical guide to Buddhist meditation, including audio guided meditations, online courses, MP3 downloads, book reviews, and blog articles.

~ Mary Schaefer

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(Bhante Sangharakshita, Summer 2010)



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# Right Concentration

## Learning to Cultivate the Four Jhanas



By Dh. Bodhipaksa

**A** lot of the time in meditation our experience is filled with distractions relentlessly colonizing our attention. We set off to follow the sensations of the breathing, but after some time we come to realize that we haven't been paying attention to the breath at all. We realize that we've been caught up in some inner drama, or that we've been turning over thoughts in the mind. What were we thinking about, exactly? Often it's hard to say. Our distractions are often dream-like, and on "awakening" into a more mindful state they slip away from us, as do our dreams when we wake in the morning.

We commit ourselves once more to mindfully observing our experience, but the cycle goes on.

Yet once in a while, like a blessing, come joy and ease. We find ourselves effortlessly able to stay with our experience. Our distractions are nowhere to be seen. The mind is calm, and we're deeply happy. We feel alive and vital.

This kind of experience is called *jhana* (Sanskrit: *dhyana*), and it arises when the five hindrances of ill will, sense desire, restlessness and anxiety, sloth and torpor, and doubt have been dispelled. The turbulent emotions that normally fill our consciousness are gone, and we find that the mind is naturally joyful and focused.

There are four levels of *jhana*, each one deeper than that preceding it, and collectively they constitute *samma samadhi*, or right concentration. Some Buddhist schools place little emphasis on the *ghanas*, and some teachers dismiss them altogether as non-Buddhist, but any objective look at the earliest Buddhist teachings shows that in the early Buddhist tradition they were regarded as tremendously important, and as indispensable for enlightenment.

So if we're serious about freeing ourselves and others from suffering, we should be serious about deepening our experience of *jhana*. How, then, can we move beyond having *jhana* as an experience we sometimes stumble into accidentally, and make it more of a regular occurrence in our meditation? Getting into *jhana* is easier than you might think. I'm going to outline an approach that I've found to be useful in cultivating *jhana*. Before we begin, I'm assuming that outside of your meditation practice you have trained yourself to be reasonably ethical. After all, you meditate with the same mind that you carry around in the rest of your life. My approach is based on an adaptation of the traditional list of *jhana* factors that's found in the *suttas* (early Buddhist scriptures). In the *suttas* we find that there are four "*jhana* factors" described.

First, there's *piti*, which is often translated as "rapture," but which is better thought of as physical pleasure and energy. *Piti* can manifest as a feeling of ease, warmth, and relaxation, as localized tingling, or as currents of energy flowing

important thing to note about initial and sustained thought is that they're the kind of thinking we do when the mind is calm.

In my approach to cultivating *jhana*, I start with developing the calmness that supports initial and sustained thought. There are many ways to do this, including paying attention to two separate sensations in the body, or paying attention to the outbreath, or paying attention to the movements of the abdomen. All these things tend to quiet the mind. It's important, in calming the mind, to keep coming back to the sensations in the body, and to let go of any unnecessary tensions, so that the body relaxes.

Once the body begins to relax, *piti* (pleasure, energy) tends to arise naturally. The release of tensions from the body is experienced as pleasurable. And as we observe the body, and especially sensitive parts of the body like the hands, we notice a sense of tingling, or of flowing energy.

*Sukha* (joy) can be encouraged simply by paying attention to pleasure and energy in the body. However we have to simply *accept* pleasure, and not grasp after it. We can also encourage the arising of joy by smiling, by imbuing our experience with a sense of lovingkindness, and by appreciating the present moment as something miraculous. (There's nothing like taking our experience for granted for killing joy).

With a calm mind, pleasure and energy in the body, and a mind imbued with joy, *jhana* begins to flow naturally. At this point we're not simply observing the sensations of the

## "If we're serious about freeing ourselves and others from suffering, we should be serious about deepening our experience of *jhana*."

in the body. In everyday life, *piti* is experienced when we're startled, or when we listen to arousing music, or when we're relaxing (e.g. when we're having a massage).

The second factor is *sukha*. This is joy. While *piti* is physical, *sukha* is emotional. It's the emotion that arises when we're free from the distractions and turbulence of the hindrances, and when the mind is undisturbed by the world around us. Joy is something we've all experienced outside of meditation.

The third and fourth *jhana* factors are *vitakka* and *vicara*, which are both forms of thought. In the first of the four *ghanas*, there is still some thinking going on. This is not "monkey-mind," with our attention leaping from one thought to another on a whim, like a monkey swinging from branch to branch. *Vitakka* is called "initial thought," and it's when a thought simply pops — or is dropped — into the mind but doesn't go anywhere. It doesn't start off a train of random thoughts. Initial thoughts may pop into the mind, as when we think, "Gosh, this meditation is going well," and we simply leave the thought there without pursuing it. Or we may introduce an initial thought into meditation, as when we drop in the words, "May all beings be well," and simply notice what happens. *Vicara* is called "sustained thought" and is a mindful train of thought. The counting in the mindfulness of breathing is a form of sustained thought — a series of connected thoughts that doesn't deviate from its course. The

breath, but noticing the breath accompanied by the experience of pleasure and joy.

Although it's not enumerated as a *jhana* factor, *continuity of awareness* becomes a prominent experience at this point. We're able to stay with our meditation practice quite effortlessly. Our experience is generally very pleasurable at this point, and so the mind has no motivation to go wandering. If calmness, pleasure, and joy are present, but continuity of awareness isn't yet established, then what is needed is a gentle effort — an effort that seeks to perceive the object of concentration more vividly.

Calmness, pleasure, joy, and continuity of awareness can be regarded as a practical set of *jhana* factors, not simply seen as milestones showing us that we've reached *jhana* (as the traditional *jhana* factor list tends to be used) but as tools to help bring *jhana* into being. At any point in your meditation you can assess the balance of calmness, pleasure, joy, and continuity of awareness. (You can even give each factor a score out of ten!)

If one or more of these factors is less developed than the others, you have a clear sense of what you need to be working on in order to bring *jhana* about. *Jhana* ceases to be an accident and simply becomes what happens in meditation. And by repeatedly establishing the mind in *jhana* you turn your mind into a powerful tool for reflection, and for cultivating insight. ♦♦



# Sports and the Spiritual Life

By Stephen Sloan

For some time now I've been interested in how my interest in sports aligns with my spiritual life. Contemplating the two together brings up many questions such as:

- Does the interest in one's team look like intoxication?
- Does rooting for one's team induce negative mental states?
- Is sport watching just a distraction?

Can we learn anything relevant to the spiritual life by watching sports?

- Are there any transcendental aspects to sport?
- How can sports play a positive role in my practice?

By way of background, I've been a sports fan since my early childhood. When I was about seven or eight I began to listen to crystal radios. A crystal radio receiver is a very simple radio receiver, popular in the early days of radio. It needs no battery or power source and runs on the power received from radio waves by a long wire antenna. It gets its name from its most important component, known as a crystal detector, originally made with a piece of crystalline mineral such as galena. Crystal radios aren't very powerful and only a few stations came in well enough to listen to. One of them broadcasted the Boston Red Sox and thus I began a lifelong love affair with the Red Sox. It didn't make things any easier that my father was a New York Yankees fan. While the Red Sox were frequently in the "cellar," the Yankees were winning World Series.

My older brother was a bit of a football fan and the first football game I remember watching was with him. It was a New York Giants game. Back then New England didn't have a football team of its own, so most New Englanders were Giants fans.

From there I remember my early interest in the Olympics, golf, the Boston Bruins, New England (then Boston) Patriots, and the Boston Celtics, roughly in that order.

One of my most memorable early sports memories came from the 1967 World Series. By then I had been a loyal Red Sox fan for several years but the Red Sox had never made it to post-season play. 1967 was different and the Sox made it to the World Series

where they faced Bob Gibson and the rest of the St. Louis Cardinals. This was my first taste of the disappointment that characterized many years of my experience as a Red Sox fan, since the series went seven games, only to see the Red Sox lose to the aforementioned Bob Gibson. The Sox made it to the World Series two more times in 1975 and 1986, only to lose again in seven games. That made the experience of 2004 all the more sweet when the Sox broke an 86-year drought by winning the World Series.

While I could go on and on about my ups and downs as a New England sports fan, this article is about sports and the spiritual life and you may be wondering by now: when is he going to get to the spiritual side of things?

So one of the main concerns that I've identified regarding watching sports is the type of mental state that can arise. From my outline above you can see that I've come to identify with a number of teams over the years. So when those teams are doing well I tend to feel better than when they're doing poorly. That by itself is probably not much of a concern unless it escalates to a point where I'm losing touch with what's really going on around me rather than the semi-imaginary world of the TV screen where my team is playing (of course there really is a real game being played by real people somewhere but since most of my sports viewing is done on television, there's a certain degree of fantasy that is introduced by larger-than-life figures streaming into my living room). Recently I was watching a very close and exciting playoff game (high stakes) which had gone for most of the game with no score. My team had just had a late score against them and appeared likely to lose. When my wife came in to say good night, at first I was so caught up in the game that I didn't want to be interrupted even for the few minutes that it would take to say "good night." Here I had fallen into a totally distracted state that in many ways could be equated with intoxication. However, I was able to notice what was going on fairly quickly, release my attention from the game, and carry on with my human relationship.

What about the preferences that inevitably arise when one begins to identify with a team? A few years ago I interviewed a visiting Tibetan monk for the *Vajra Bell*. His advice on how I should

approach the New York Yankees (the archrival to my beloved Red Sox) was to work on cultivating equanimity. That was profound advice and I've been contemplating how I could put it into practice ever since. A question naturally arises: "Is it possible to practice equanimity when one has a favorite team?" So far it seems to me that some level of equanimity is possible. For instance, I no longer feel any personal enmity towards players on the opposing team. I'm able to appreciate that members of the Yankees are human just like me and that they have the same desire for happiness that I have. I am able to appreciate their skill when they make a good play. But given all that, I still have a preference that the Red Sox should win when watching the two teams play.

Recently I travelled to England where I was on retreat at Padmaloka. One of the retreat leaders was Padmavajra and I asked him about his experience with watching football in England (what would be called soccer in the U.S.). He said that he found it very difficult to remain equanimous when he was watching the English national team. So even though he enjoyed watching games, he told me that he didn't think it was possible to maintain skillful mental states while watching sports in which a team with which you had an emotional connection was participating.

Following the retreat at Padmaloka, I travelled to Cambridge to visit my friend Paramashanti. While in residence at Aryaloka, Paramashanti had been introduced to American football and had become an ardent fan of the New England Patriots. Paramashanti also enjoys rugby and other sports. His take on the question at hand involves maintaining awareness of our mental states as we're watching sports. Paramashanti doesn't see mundane pleasures as inherently unskillful since we have to recognize that we're living in *samsara*. But it's important for us to maintain awareness so that really unskillful mental states don't arise.

My final stop in England was in Birmingham where I had the opportunity to meet with Sangharakshita (Bhante), the founder of the Triratna Buddhist Community. When I asked him about how sports could fit into the spiritual life I was a bit surprised that he knew quite a bit about the subject. First he related the difficulties that had arisen around two football (soccer) teams from Glasgow, one of which was made up of Protestants and the other Catholics.

Games between the two teams often were marked by riots in the stands as the passionate fans of the two teams would fight, in several cases leading to people being killed. Bhante felt that this sort of result from sports was very undesirable. Bhante also discussed the influence that high pay for athletes had brought, resulting, in some cases, in athletes who had lost their humanity and who resorted to play designed to injure their opponent. Bhante also thought that the influence of gambling in sports was unfortunate.

Bhante seemed to suggest that there could be some positive side to sports, for instance the inspirational performance by some athletes in the Olympics. But it was his answer to one of my other questions that gave me the most to think about.

My question was, "Would there be any place for sports in the life of an aspiring Bodhisattva?" Bhante smiled a bit before answering, "Well, a Bodhisattva would be quite busy, wouldn't he?" That was the end of our discussion on sports – I really didn't have anything more to say after that.

So I'm still working with the questions that come up for me concerning my interest in sports in the context of my Going for Refuge. I do think there can be moments in sport that approach the transcendental – for instance, the grace of movement of some athletes is similar to a great work of art that can inspire us and perhaps lead to a moment of insight. Truly great teamwork can help us to realize our connections with all other beings.

Sports can play a part in our practice also. The passions that we experience when rooting for our team gives us an opportunity to be more aware of our mental states and the results of different types of stimuli. Ultimately I don't think that an interest in sports could carry us to Enlightenment. But, at least for now, I don't find it to be such an impediment to my spiritual life, where I would need to eliminate all contact. Instead my plan is to follow a "Middle Way," carefully using mindfulness to try to avoid negative mental states and maintain equanimity while still enjoying the game. ~ *Stephen Sloan*

*Note from author: If this topic is of interest to you, I'd love to hear from you about your experience of sports in the context of the spiritual life. Perhaps your input can form the impetus for a future article on this topic. ♦♦*

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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 writ-

er? Well, now is the chance to challenge 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. ♦♦



## Fresh Ink, Flowing Water

On Sunday, July 10<sup>th</sup>, we will have a wonderful opportunity to focus on more contemplative arts with *Fresh Ink; Flowing Water*, a day to drop expectations and move ink across the page, with Dh. Kiranada's encouragement. We will work with a deep sense of letting go to see what clear water and fresh black ink feel like on the white page. This will be partly a sumi-e class, a calligraphy class, an ink painting class, and a place to look at some simple Japanese kanji symbols. Experiential and experimental, indeed!

We will be encouraged to "rest in the line" and explore what ink on paper feels like. We'll learn about traditional work with ink and calligraphy, and how they have been part of Zen Buddhist art for centuries, loved for its visual forms and contemplated for its beauty and its secrets to being fully human. It has been said of this art that "each work was a tangible record of an unrepeatable moment in the artist's mind, an expression on paper of his or her understanding of the nature of things." Wow!

There are great hopes that some of *Fresh Ink* may be shared in the fall with the larger sangha. Such fun. ~ Dh. Kiranada

## Sweet Tunes from Silk Tones

We were humming for days after, with great smiles on our faces. Saturday, June 4<sup>th</sup>, brought us a most entertaining and enlivening evening full of sweet music, rich silky harmonies, and delectable desserts.

The Silk Tones, an a cappella group of seven from the Boston area, presented us with a fast moving evening of twenty-four different pieces, from jazz to Broadway to popular ballads.

Everyone had their favorites, but I heard lots of praise for the jazzy *Chili Con Carne*, the fun *Hit the Road Jack*, love songs such as *Unforgettable* and *Funny Valentine*, and a hilarious take-off on the beautiful *Pachelbel Canon*, called the *Taco Bell Canon*. The "great Buddhist Sage – Sting" was represented with *Fragile* – "nothing comes of violence, nothing ever will." Following was the familiar *William Tell Overture* as a fast-paced vocal instrumental.

The Silk Tones have been singing together for almost five years, and our own Dharmacharini Sunada says, "It's great that we're all friends. We enjoy each others' company and rehearsing together, just for its own sake. Performing is icing on the cake." Aryaloka has been the lucky beneficiary of this joy once before, in May of 2007.

There was some sadness during the evening, however, with the announcement that this performance would be their last, with the loss of one of their core singers due to a job transfer. Ahh, im-



Photo © Susan Wilson, [www.susanwilsonphoto.com](http://www.susanwilsonphoto.com)

permanence even in vocal groups! We do hope that we will hear more from this exceptional group in the future, in some form. They were sent off that evening with chocolate and our deep thanks for all they had shared with our Aryaloka community through their talents, friendship, and wonderful harmonies.

And what could have been better than that extraordinary chocolate buffet to begin and end the evening!

Many thanks to the wonderful ten who offered their chocolate talents and to the splendid Mary Schaefer for coordinating the evening. Yes, it WAS an evening not to be missed!

~ Dh. Kiranada

# Contemplative Movement and the Environment

With a strong desire to add movement to our contemplative arts program at Aryaloka, we welcome Dawn Kramer, of Massachusetts College of Art and Design, on Saturday, October 8th, to lead us in a day of movement and video. This really is an unusual opportunity to work with a well-known Boston choreographer and performer. During the day Dawn and her partner, Stephen Buck, will share some of their great silent video-movement-poems made at Zen Temples in Kyoto and on the coast of Maine and Liguria, Italy. These videos envision the human figure at a small scale in relation to the natural environment and help us to reflect more clearly on the balance between the two.

The "non-threatening" day workshop will begin with meditation and grounding and continue onto simple physical and vocal warm-ups. After breaking into small working groups, Dawn will give us guidelines for creating performances in response to specific sites along the river or forest, chosen by the participants (fingers crossed on the weather). There will be time to work on performances and, later, to share with others. We hope to film some of these performances for viewing at another time. This is all experiential fun and all are welcomed.

Dawn Kramer is on faculty at MassArt in the SIMS department (Studio of Interrelated Media), artistic co-director of the Boston Dance Collective, where she has directed more than seventy performances over thirty years. Her work is now more involved with video projects that span the visual and dance worlds. Sheila and I were pleased to attend a performance of Dawn and Stephen's latest production, *Body of Water*, at MassArt in June and came away dazzled and inspired. See Dawn's website [www.dawnkramer.info](http://www.dawnkramer.info) for links to her video-poems.



Photo courtesy Dawn Kramer

So come! Call the office now to register for this wonderful day. The date is Sunday, October 8<sup>th</sup>, and the cost is \$60. A vegetarian lunch is included. Come join us! Make art a part of your contemplative practice and your exploration of positive emotion.

~ Dh. Kiranada

## New Aryaloka Poetry Group Inspires Openness, Creativity

I can't tell you how many times I've read a poem, put the book down and simply marveled at the poet's ability to evoke so much emotion with a handful of words. Poems have made me laugh out loud or brought me to tears; they have defined the unexplainable and left me with wonder. I read poetry but have never attempted to write any poetry, so it was with trepidation that I attended the first "Aryaloka Poetry Group" on June 12<sup>th</sup>.

I told myself I was going to the poetry group as an observer so I could write an article for the *Vajra Bell*. I felt completely out of my element, but a small part of me was curious – did I have a speck of talent deep inside me? Is this something I could attempt without too much embar-



arrassment? Those questions are yet to be answered, but what I did experience was a delightful few hours discussing the creativity and magic of the written word.

We were asked to bring something we had written, or something that someone else had written, or just show up and listen. I did the show up and listen part of the evening. Members of the group read aloud

their original poems and haiku. We also enjoyed listening to works from other poets ranging from the Sufi poet Hafiz to Portsmouth's past Poet Laureate, Robert Dunn. We talked about how the imagination is set free through poetry and the powerful mental pictures poems and song lyrics can paint.

Everyone is welcome to attend the group. The Aryaloka Poetry Group will be meeting the fourth Sunday of the month from 4-6 p.m. from July through October, then every third Sunday from 4-6 p.m. in November and December. The evenings are free and, as always, donations toward the maintenance of Aryaloka are always greatly appreciated.

~ Elizabeth Hellard

## poetry corner

### Putting on Her Robes (for Kuan-Yin)

by Dh. Kiranada

Slipping my arms through the robes of her floating white garment,  
Wrapping the cloth around me, raising the hood to my crown,  
I dwell in the soft white raiment of love and compassion.

I open my eyes, and see the world through her eyes,  
Seeing the pain and suffering,  
And, with the graceful equanimity of the bodhisattva,  
Washing it in compassion and reflective truth.

I smell the noxious fumes of anger and deceit,  
And transform it with the pervasive perfume  
Of lotus-born kindness and truth.

I taste the labor and efforts  
Of numerous caregivers,  
And hold the plum of generous effort  
On my tongue --- with gratitude.

I hear the tap of the elder's cane, the shrieks of children,  
The cooing of birds, the engines and swoosh of a felled tree,  
And am content --- connected and in harmony  
With the multiple beings that weave me into  
This web of interconnected humanity.

I stand, and step forward, in flowing robes,  
Moving through the vibrant air  
As my Bodhisattva in body – in heart.  
And with a quiet, focused mind --- radiantly clear and sky-like.  
I experience the waking world, as my yidam .....  
To be awakened and transformed.

---

### Triptych Poem

by Kristen Lanzer

january thaw

january thaw,  
sky reflects in  
blue puddles.

thaw

rodent's tunnel revealed.  
mouse takes flight  
in hawk's beak.

spring

like new seedlings  
the poems were not quite ready  
for full sun.



### Original Summer Haiku

by Carol Doering

the smell of summer mornings early  
as I walk out the door

in the water, timeless  
clouds in the oval above  
drift at the same speed

the river turns  
setting sun in your eyes  
paddle toward it

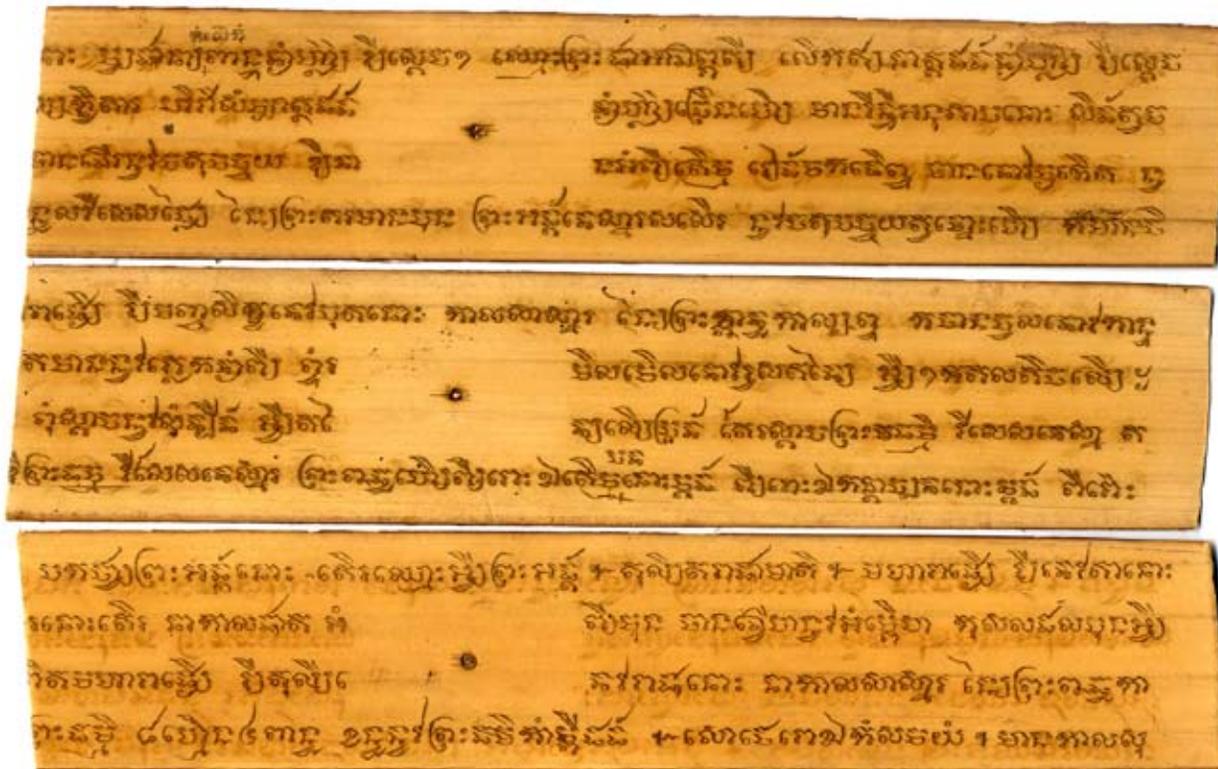
soft ticking of a clock  
play of shadow  
quiet house

a mother goose  
long black white-banded neck  
thrusts up and down in defense

all of a sudden  
the longed-for heat of summer  
drops like a blanket

smell of the rain  
deep green forest  
enters the house

Saturn and a half-moon  
show white violets  
between the stones



# Dhammapada: A Little Book with Big Lessons

By Mary Schaefer

What's the old saying "Never judge a book by its cover?" With the *Dhammapada*, I realized you can't judge a book by its size either.

I've heard the Buddhist text referenced frequently this past year, so I put it on my "have to get to that eventually" list. This spring, I finally got myself a copy of *Dhammapada: The Way of Truth*, translated by Sangharakshita, for my mitra class. It's just a little book of some 150 pages. I thought, "Small book, short verses, quick read. Right?" Not.

The *Dhammapada*, an anthology of 423 verses, has long been recognized as one of the masterpieces not just of Buddhist but of world literature. The book jacket says, "It can be taken as a straightforward and practical summary of the essential teachings of the Buddha... a poetic representation of a sublime spiritual ideal." As we delved into it, I realized these short verses – often like good poetry – hold layer upon layer of meaning and truth. Little book. Big lessons.

Even though the text is not long, particularly by Sangharakshita's standards, the course guide said we would not have time to study it all during the eight-week class. We were encouraged to "live" with the *Dhammapada* more closely, dipping in and out of it during our daily activities. I listened to the talks on my walks along the Merrimac River. In this "living with" the text, I would find a simple phrase or verse shedding a blazing new light of understanding on a teaching or a familiar set of my own conditioning.

One pair of verses (7 and 8) talked about the power of Mara. Mara personifies unskillfulness. He distracts us from practicing

the spiritual life by making the mundane alluring or the "unlovely seem lovely." In these verses, Mara is like a wind blowing down a weak tree; I being the "weak tree" when my "senses are uncontrolled" and I'm being "immoderate in food, lazy, and of inferior vigour."

The course guide suggested we list our Maras. That alone could take the full eight weeks in my case.

A big one for me is the "do-more" Mara. This Mara drives me relentlessly to do more, be more, get more done. I thought of the rule I grew up with: can't play until my work is done. Of course, the catch is that the work IS NEVER done, and so when do I get to play? "Do-more" Mara manifests itself in my body in tightness and achiness. I try to remedy that with more exercise, better diet, more sleep, more yoga. All of those things are good for me, of course, but can become just another version of my wrestling match with Mara. If I'm not mindful, even my meditation can become part of my "do-more" list.

The verses I related to most readily were in the "Spiritually Immature" chapter. I guess that shouldn't surprise me. These verses told me how the more I try to do it my way, the more trouble I get in. In particular, I liked the phrase "the spiritually immature one who thinks of himself as mature is termed immature indeed." I smiled at that, recalling discussions with friends on the meaning of humility. If you think you're humble, you're probably not.

The "Spiritually Immature" chapter, fittingly, comes before the "Spiritually Mature" one. I figure I can stay with this one awhile before I'm ready for the next chapter in this little book with such big lessons. And that, for now, is the way of my truth. ♦

# Erasing the Lines

By Richard Cormier

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin had a dream that one day humanity would discover the power of love. He wrote:

“Someday, after we have mastered the wind, the waves, the tide and gravity, we shall harness for God the energies of love. Then, for the second time in the history of the world, man will have discovered fire.”

This vision of a loving humanity isn't something society is unaware of – rather society seems to view it as lacking, or as a weakness with respect to our conduct or position, when we treat one another with love. This ideal is considered fantasy primarily because the gap between where we are and where we wish to be is so vast. Traversing the distance, making it a reality, feels impossi-

ble. How can we actualize what we want if we don't believe it can happen? Every success manual I've ever read, whether its goal for success was material wealth or spiritual development, tries to impress upon the reader the need for believing. In her book *The Secret*, Rhonda Byrne lays out a three-step method – Ask, Believe, Receive – whereby belief is the catalyst for gaining whatever is sought. The Bible speaks of prayer as a means to ask for what is needed, but faith is paramount in the receipt.

On the path, Buddhists are advised of the hindrance of doubt. A lack of belief, faith, and trust in what we are trying to attain will only reinforce the notion that “this isn't really possible.” I want to believe in Enlightenment. Trusting in the Buddha's method is fine while seated in meditation, or while sitting with the sangha and debating the merits, but it's difficult in the face of adverse conditions. The ego has a tremendously powerful grasp. My attachment to my self, and to its clever tactics, continues the rounds of *samsara*.

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## Growing Pains & Gains

*Continued from Page 3*

- **Spiritual Vitality** – to support and foster spiritual life and spiritual development in the areas of ethics, meditation, and wisdom within the sangha.
- **Finance** – to provide sound stewardship of Aryaloka's financial resources and maintain fiscal accountability.
- **Facilities** – to ensure a safe, functional, and inviting center for spiritual practice
- **Development** – to increase awareness of Aryaloka, generate revenue, and support communication.
- **Administration** – to provide administrative, communication, and event support for the Council, Council Teams, kulas, and the sangha

## The Work Continues

Our work now involves examining how we communicate with our sangha, internally within the Council, and among the Council Teams and their kulas. The next phase of the restructuring is focused on identifying and then addressing the communication needs of members of our spiritual community that will support their practice and their participation as a member of this community. To better understand those needs, we are doing an online communication survey soon to guide us in creating useful, timely and appropriate communication for everyone. We hope to have the data in July, and will report those findings to the sangha. We encourage ev-



eryone to participate so that we can have a good representation of the sangha's communication needs.

This has been a very exciting and productive effort that reflects the hard work and many hours of those who have been involved. We are encouraged and see evidence that our work is taking hold.

## A Council Update from Dayalocana, Council Chair

Aryaloka is largely run by volunteers. Your help and support is important, not just to keep the Center running efficiently but also to support our individual and collective spiritual practice and friendship. Practice isn't just about meditation

or study, it includes working together for the sake of all. It is in working with others in spiritual community that we practice mindfulness and learn patience, compassion, and caring for others.

As with our practice, this reorganization is a work in progress that will continue. We invite you to let us know if you have questions about these organizational changes or would like to contribute and share your ideas with us. It is through our collective efforts that we deepen our individual practice, create a vibrant spiritual community, and share the Three Jewels with the world.

*~ Jean Corson, planning consultant*

## Erasing the Lines

Continued from Page 18

There is always a line we come to that we cannot cross. At our last retreat, I used the example of open-handed generosity to try to make the point that in order to make this positive precept real, the lines must be crossed or even erased. With generosity, the follow-through shows just how far we are willing to go. The justifications for why we won't give materially, compassionately, patiently, and so on verify just how much our identity and our fears can't handle, or where they will not allow us to cross. I'm open to alternative interpretations, but my understanding is that each time we become aware of a "line" and we turn away, we keep the ideal of Enlightenment from becoming a reality.

The Eightfold Path is the means to erase these lines. Eckhart Tolle in *A New Earth* says it well:

"We are also learning that action, although necessary, is only a secondary factor in manifesting our external reality. The primary factor in creation is consciousness. No matter how active we are, how much effort we make, our state of consciousness creates our world, and if there is no change on that inner level, no amount of action will make any difference. We would recreate modified versions of the same world again and again, a world that is the external reflection of the ego."

As I've progressed along the path, I've crossed over many lines. Yet, another line always materializes a bit further down the road. Some say this is to be expected, that it's a sign of progress to challenge and overcome the limits we set.

Will there always be a point when we say, "No?" Can we finally say, in surrender, "Yes?" Can we find the courage and erase the lines? The answer lies within faith, belief, and trust, and of course, within ourselves. ♦♦

## Upcoming Events

Continued from Page 20

### SEPTEMBER 2011

- 4 Order day
- 5 Men's mitra class
- 6 Sangha Night, 6:45-9:15 p.m.
- 6-9 Preceptors' Retreat
- 9-18 North American retreat for men who have asked for ordination
- 13 Sangha Night, 6:45-9:15 p.m. – VENUE TBA
- 19 Men's mitra class
- 20 Sangha Night, 6:45-9:15 p.m.
- 21 Intro to Buddhism and Meditation 7-9 p.m.
- 22 Women's mitra class
- 25 Poetry group 4-6 p.m.
- 26 Men's mitra class

- 27 Sangha Night, 6:45-9:15 p.m.
- 28 Intro to Buddhism and Meditation 7-9 p.m.
- 28-10/2 Rental
- 29 Women's mitra class

### OCTOBER 2011

- 20-23 Open Heart, Quiet Mind yoga and meditation retreat
- 26-11/1 Noble Silence retreat

### DECEMBER 2011

- 24-31 Winter meditation retreat – Varada

### JANUARY 2012

- 1 Meditate for Peace Day 6 a.m. to 6 p.m.

## Full Moon Puja Nights Offered Every Month

Once a month on the Friday nearest to the full moon, Aryaloka is open for an evening of devotional worship. We gather for meditation and dharma readings followed by a Seven-Fold Puja. Buddhism is a path of transformation and puja offers the opportunity for sangha members to come together in collective practice to cultivate our emotions, refine our senses, and enrich our imaginations. Traditionally the performance of a puja is an emotional and spiritual preparation for the arising of the Bodhicitta – the "will or aspiration for the Enlightenment of all beings."

Puja includes three main elements: reciting verses, chanting, and making offerings. The seven parts are associated with the principal ideals of Buddhism and give expression to our spiritual aspirations.

It's a lovely way for fellow practitioners to come together and enjoy the collective benefits of awakening the heart through ritual and devotional practice.

Puja begins at 7 p.m., but a small group will usually gather earlier for tea and conversation. No registration is necessary and a free-will donation will be gratefully received. Please join us each month and enjoy the blessings of the Bodhicitta.

~ Elizabeth Hellard

## Policy for Retreat Deposits:

### RETREATS/CLASSES/SOLITARIES

Those registering for retreats (including solitaries) 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 web site at <http://www.aryaloka.org> or call the office at 603-659-5456.)

*Akasaloka events are in italics.*

### JULY 2011

- 1-3 Order member retreat with Parami
- 4 Men's mitra class
- 5 Sangha Night, 6:45-9:15 p.m.
- 6 Intro to Meditation Summer Drop-In Class, Mindfulness, 7:15-9:15 p.m.
- 7 Women's mitra class
- 9 Men's practice day
- 10 Fresh Ink, Flowing Water arts day, 10 a.m.-3 p.m.
- 11 Men's mitra class
- 12 Sangha Night, 6:45-9:15 p.m.
- 13 Intro to Meditation Summer Drop-In Class, Metta, 7:15-9:15 p.m.
- 14 Women's mitra class
- 15 *Full-moon puja and meditation, 7-9 p.m.*
- 15-17 Retreat with Nagabodhi
- 18 Men's mitra class
- 19 Sangha Night, 6:45-9:15 p.m.
- 20 Intro to Meditation Summer Drop-In Class, Mindfulness, 7:15-9:15 p.m.
- 21 Women's mitra class
- 22 Dharma Day – Vidhuma, 7 p.m.
- 22-23 Concord prison retreat
- 23 *Council and Order meetings with Nagabodhi, times TBA*
- 23 Rental
- 24 Nagabodhi meets with men mitras
- 24 Poetry group 4-6 p.m.
- 25 Men's mitra class
- 26 Sangha Night, 6:45-9:15 p.m.
- 27 Intro to Meditation Summer Drop-In Class, Metta, 7:15-9:15 p.m.
- 28 *Women's mitra class*
- 28-31 Open Heart, Quiet Mind yoga and meditation retreat

- 30 *Intro to Meditation – Mindfulness, Amala, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.*

### AUGUST 2011

- 1-7 Drepan Gomag Monks (see web site for schedule)
- 1 *Men's mitra class*
- 2 Sangha Night, 6:45-9:15 p.m.
- 4 *Women's mitra class*
- 7 Order afternoon
- 8 Men's mitra class
- 9 Sangha Night, 6:45-9:15 p.m.
- 10 Intro to Meditation Summer Drop-In Class, Mindfulness, 7:15-9:15 p.m.
- 11 Women's mitra class
- 12 Full-moon puja and meditation, 7-9 p.m.
- 13 Going Deeper Into Mindfulness, 8:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.
- 13 *Intro to Buddhism – Prasannavajri, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.*
- 14 Sangha Summer Picnic 12-2 p.m.
- 15 Men's mitra class
- 16 Sangha Night, 6:45-9:15 p.m.
- 17 Intro to Meditation Summer Drop-In Class, Metta, 7:15-9:15 p.m.
- 19-26 Abiding in Ease, Here and Now retreat – Bodhipaksa
- 22 Men's mitra class – VENUE TBA
- 23 Sangha Night, 6:45-9:15 p.m. – VENUE TBA
- 26-28 Yoga retreat with Lily Sibley
- 27 Men's practice day
- 28 Intro to Noble Silence – Bodhana, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.
- 28 Poetry group 4-6 p.m.
- 29 Men's mitra class
- 30 Sangha Night, 6:45-9:15 p.m.

*continued on page 19*

## ongoing events

### 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