

SUMMER 2012

vajrabell

keeping sangha connected

A SYSTEM OF PRACTICE

*Dhammarati introduces and shares his reflections
on the Five Great Stages of the Spiritual Path*

Also in
this issue:

Aryaloka holds first
Meditation Marathon

Best-loved books
by Sangharakshita



Following a sudden jump into ninety-degree weather in late June here in New England, I guess we can safely say that summer is finally here. The plants have begun

to tentatively get moving on the season after months of uncertainty, and now race towards autumn. The skies have opened up with lighting and thunder to dispel the discomfort of heat and humidity. Everything smells sweet, and green, and of the earth.

Now that it's here, what a summer it is shaping up to be! And what an issue of *Vajra Bell* to go along with it! There's so much to look forward to, I can't wait to share it with you all, and I think we have a real jewel for you.

As always, Aryaloka has an excellent program of retreats, classes, and workshops planned, with the addition of drop-in yoga and meditation classes since our Spring issue came out. Two of our upcoming events are highlighted in this issue: a workshop with Viriyagita called *Living in the Realm of the Bodhisattvas*, and a retreat with Arjava and Karunasara on the Brahma Viharas.

Our first-ever Meditation Marathon will be held in August, and it promises to be a big event with lots of excitement, energy, and fun - as well as being a great fundraiser for the center. You can find more information on that event, and more on how you can take part yourself or help out, in the sangha section of this issue. You'll also be hearing many more details about it in the coming months. Don't miss out!

And on the heels of the marathon, our annual Aryaloka Sangha Picnic will be coming up in late August. This is a great way to spend some unstructured time together and enjoy some great food and

great sun on the back lawn.

Our center president, Nagabodhi, will be visiting from the UK in July and will be bringing his depth as a Public Preceptor, his wonderful presence, and no doubt his vibrant and gentle sense of humor to Stephen Sloan's ordination ceremony.

We have updates this issue for the first time from our spiritual friends at Rocky Mountain Buddhist Center in Missoula, Montana, and also from Triratna Vancouver, in Canada. It's great to hear from them and find out what's happening with our Dharma brothers and sisters from far afield.

Our centerpiece for this issue is a simply fantastic interview with Dhammarati, an active member of the Triratna Preceptors' College, a great friend to our centers and sanghas in North America, and one of the real "movers and shakers" of the Movement. Here he discusses a central teaching of Sangharakshita's on the System of Practice. The System, and its implications for individual practice, are part of a large discussion within our community at the moment, and Dhammarati offers a wonderful introduction to the basic ideas and a very deep reading and reflection on its wider meanings.

Also, Steve Cardwell has put together an excellent collection of reviews for the Buddhaworks article on some of Sangharakshita's best-known and most-loved books. Several Order members chime in on which of Sangharakshita's works have been most seminal to their own practice - a very rewarding read.

The arts section is overflowing with creativity - with articles on Japanese ink workshops, trips to the Sackler Museum, upcoming exhibits at Aryaloka, beautiful poetry offerings, and a call for participants for an amazing tour to Japan in 2013.

So much to see, and read, and do! So, we hope you enjoy this issue of the *Vajra Bell*, and many heartfelt wishes, dear sangha, for a blissful summer.

vajrabel

www.aryaloka.org/category/vajra-bell

VAJRA BELL KULA

EDITOR IN CHIEF: *Eric Wentworth*
eric@wintercrowstudio.com

ADMINISTRATION EDITOR: *Dh. Vihanasari*
vihanasari@comcast.net

SANGHA EDITOR: *Stephen Sloan*
sloan@comcast.net

ASST. SANGHA EDITOR: *Pam White*
pwhite31@comcast.net

FEATURES EDITOR: *Mary Schaefer*
mbschaefer@comcast.net

ARTS EDITOR: *Elizabeth Hellard*
ekhellard@comcast.net

ARYALOKA COUNCIL MEMBERS

COUNCIL CHAIR: *Dh. Dayalocana*
dayalocana@comcast.net

TREASURER: *Tom Gaillard*
tgaillard@yahoo.com

Dh. Surakshita
surakshita@comcast.net

Dh. Vihanasari
vihanasari@comcast.net

Dh. Akashavanda
akashavanda@gmail.com

Dh. Arjava
havaughan@comcast.net

Dh. Shrijnana
shrijnana@gmail.com

Brian "Jumbo" Jervis
jervisbrian@yahoo.com

Eric Wentworth
eric@wintercrowstudio.com

Aryaloka Buddhist Retreat Center
14 Heartwood Circle
Newmarket, NH 03857
603-659-5456

info@aryaloka.org • www.aryaloka.org

Cover photograph: Eric Wentworth

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

musings from the chair || Dh. Dayalocana



Imagine sitting on the porch on a summer evening at Aryaloka listening to the crickets, the breeze in the trees, and the voices of friends engaged in discussion of the Dharma. Imagine sitting in the stillness of the shrine room, early in the morning, as the

song of a bird opens your heart to meditation. Imagine walking mindfully in the gardens, noticing the purple flower fading, the red bud about to open, and the butterfly resting on the orange blossom. Imagine stillness, simplicity, and contentment deep within, honest and caring communication with friends, and the beauty of generosity to others.

Imagine yourself exploring, learning, and sharing with members of our com-

munity as we gather for classes, retreats, and special events. The summer program is rich: Nagabodhi visiting from England, Stephen Sloan's ordination, celebration of the Dharma Jewel, vegetarian cooking, and a meditation marathon! And of course our usual offerings of meditation, yoga, devotional puja, study, and poetry.

Imagine the opportunities that wait for you this summer at Aryaloka and join us whenever you can!

from the council || Dh. Vihanasari



The Council held its annual meeting with the sangha on May 31. This cafe-style event gave people a chance to move into small groups to hear information and ask questions; then break for coffee, cake, and chocolate (yum!); and come together again to discuss questions, suggestions, and concerns. Information from the discussion will be reviewed and acted on by the Council as indicated. The evening gave us all a chance to further develop a sense of community and connection with one another and to focus on our beautiful center and what goes on

here. Many thanks to those who came and to those who provided the delicious refreshments!

In other business, the July through December events program was approved as well as the introduction to the Dharma study curriculum being developed by the curriculum subcommittee. Ongoing plans for the stupa project were reviewed, including proposed locations and materials, but no action was taken.

There was also a brief discussion about welcoming newcomers to Aryaloka on Tuesday nights, and limiting links on our web site to those groups currently and directly connected to the Triratna Buddhist Community.

The Council agreed to fund the pur-

chase of environmentally-friendly cleaning and sanitizing products from one source (Summit Supply). The company will also mount hand washing dispensers in all bathrooms and at the hand washing sink in the tea area. In addition to being more "green," the use of these products will eliminate the variety of miscellaneous cleaning supplies that we have been using. Summit Supply will also provide all material safety data sheets (MSDS) for their products as well as an attachment to the washing machine that will dispense a measured amount of detergent to eliminate waste.

It was decided to postpone replacing the floor in the cabin until further options can be explored concerning the cost.

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. ♦♦

Ready... Set...Go!

It's Time for Aryaloka's 2012 Meditation Marathon!

We're delighted to announce the 2012 Meditation Marathon! This unique and exciting fundraising event will electrify our sangha this July and August, culminating in a week of meditation and celebration August 19–25. WHAT is the Meditation Marathon?! WHY is the Meditation Marathon?! For the answers to these questions, read on...

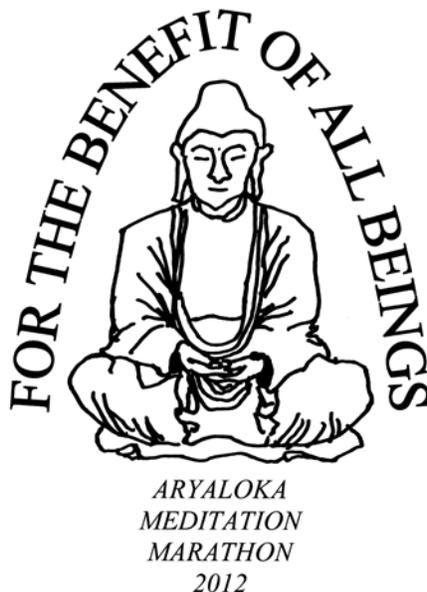
WHAT is the Meditation Marathon?

Aryaloka's 2012 Meditation Marathon is a fundraising event designed to build community, deepen our meditation practice, and bring energy and warmth to our Sangha. The Marathon is modeled on charity "walk-a-thon" activities, where committed volunteers solicit donations in support of a charity. Beginning in July, we'll invite anyone and everyone to join the Meditation Marathon! Each "marathoner" will ask friends, family, and colleagues to sponsor their practice, soliciting pledge payments in the weeks leading up to the event.

Then, on August 19th, the Meditation Marathon begins! We'll kick it off with guided meditation and fun on Sunday afternoon. Each day that week we'll hold group meditations at Aryaloka at 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. – though there's no requirement to attend. And on Saturday August 25th we'll celebrate the finish with a party including food, live entertainment, and fabulous prizes!

The Meditation Marathon is first and foremost a fundraiser, with all proceeds going to support Aryaloka's mission of spreading the Dharma on the Seacoast and beyond. Suggested donations will range from \$10 to \$50 or even higher, and there's no limit to the number of donors each marathoner can have!

Just think: one marathoner with ten donors who contribute \$20 apiece will raise \$200 for Aryaloka! And everyone who raises at least \$100 will receive a free, customized Meditation Marathon t-shirt to wear with pride!



Each marathoner will have a web page that makes donations easy and fun. You'll be able to customize the template with your own photo and message, and solicit donations by email. Donors can give online, although old-fashioned paper pledge forms are available, as well.

This sounds like it's all about money...

It's not just about the money! The marathon will focus our sangha on meditation, a crucial element of our Buddhist practice. Our meditation is "for the benefit of all beings," as the marathon logo attests. It will forge community within the sangha as we work joyously towards a common goal and it will raise awareness and support of Aryaloka in the greater Seacoast community. There's so much good that will come from this — who can resist participating?

Does this replace Aryaloka's pledge drive?

NO! The Meditation Marathon is a fun way to solicit support from the broader community. While you're welcome to sponsor yourself and others, please focus your donation "asks" on friends, family and colleagues. And don't worry — you'll

be invited to personally support Aryaloka in October, when we launch our 2013 Pledge Drive!

WHY is the Meditation Marathon?

The marathon is Aryaloka's principal fundraising event of 2012. It replaces the Aryaloka auction, which has helped raise funds for our center for many years. While the auction's been fun and successful, our development team felt that it had run its course, and that it was time to try something new.

WHO is the Meditation Marathon?

The Meditation Marathon is all of us! We have a great team leading the charge:

Co-Chairs:

Akashavanda
akashavanda@gmail.com
Tom Gaillard
tgaillard@yahoo.com

Publicity:

Eric Wentworth
eric@wintercrowstudio.com
Shrijnana
shrijnana@gmail.com
Akashavanda
akashavanda@gmail.com

Events:

Shrijnana
shrijnana@gmail.com
Jacky Lehoullier
jlehoullier@comcast.net
Les Nicholson
les.nicholson@comcast.net

Participation:

OMs: Akashavanda
akashavanda@gmail.com
Mitras: Brian Jervis
jervisbrian@yahoo.com
Friends: Dianne Wright

continued on page 7

Bodhilocana's Dream Emerges

An Update on the Stupa Project for Dhardo Rinpoche

By Dh. Viriyagita

Dhardo Rinpoche has come to Aryaloka. I repeat, Dhardo Rinpoche has come to Aryaloka. Here, within the walls of this noble place are the ashes of one of Sangharakshita's teachers, a man he called a living bodhisattva. His ashes, encased in three *tsa-tsas* (Buddha rupas made in a devotional context) have traveled all the way from Kalimpong, India to England and then on to Aryaloka. When they arrived here via Candradasa, a special ceremony was conducted on February 4th, 2012 at the Portsmouth Buddhist Center. On this Order Day the *tsa-tsas* were ritually handed over to the stupa kula.

The event was momentous and profound, and was the first step in fulfilling the dream of one of our beloved Order members, Bodhilocana, who passed away last year. Bodhilocana had a strong conec-

tion with Dhardo Rinpoche, and her wish was to create a monument at Aryaloka in memory of him. The presence of Bodhilocana and Dhardo Rinpoche were tangible at the ceremony. As I held the *tsa-tsas* in my hands, kneeling before the Buddha rupa on the shrine, my hands began to tremble. I was moved to dedicate myself more fully to the spiritual path to be worthy of the great honor of placing him upon our shrine. I felt inspired being a part of bringing Bodhilocana's dream into being.

The stupa kula, inspired further by the arrival of Dhardo Rinpoche, has proceeded to interview stonemasons to take on the project of building the stupa. We have found several who have been excited about the project and who seem to understand our core values. Now begins the process of choosing the stonemason who best negotiates an affordable price that still includes consideration of these values. Can-

dace Copp has generously offered to head a fundraising committee. We have already discussed several possibilities for raising the money necessary to complete this project. There have been a few individuals who have expressed an interest in donating a substantial amount of money and there will be a broader fundraising effort that will include the local sangha as well as the worldwide Triratna Buddhist Community. We will be putting up some visual and informational displays at Aryaloka to further explain the nature of this project.

We hope to increase sangha involvement with this project and feel that as the sangha learns more about it and becomes more involved in the creation of the stupa, we will be participating in a practice that will be under the influence of a bodhisattva. As a community endeavor, we could create conditions for the Bodhicitta to arise. Stay tuned for further updates.



Sangha Hikers Round Lake in Candia

On May 26th, a group of thirteen people (and two dogs!) went on a lovely three-mile hike around a lake in Candia. We spent time hiking and picnicking and enjoying nature and one another. It was fitting that on the first day of Memorial Day weekend, we came upon a lovely memorial

garden overlooking the serene lake where several people took time to reflect and to be still.

I think it is safe to say that a good time was had by all! Thanks once again to Shrijana for leading us on a wonderful adventure!

A Short Note from the Spiritual Vitality Team

The Spiritual Vitality Team meets every two to three months at Aryaloka. We are a component of the Council with the responsibility to make sure the Dharma is alive and well at the center and in the sangha. In the midst of many tasks and functional responsibilities of running a center our job is to remember what it is all for: to help beings learn and live the Dharma.

Often at our meetings a theme emerges out of our wide-ranging conversation. At our recent team meeting in May the pithy comment was, "Unfortunately, in Buddhism you have to do the work."

In other words, in order to realize the benefits of the Buddha's teachings in our lives we need to put them into practice. For the benefit of all beings, may we all do the work!

~ Dayalocana, Arjava,
Karunasara & Amala

sangha notes

ROCKY MOUNTAIN SANGHA (MISSOULA, MT)

Greetings from Big Sky Country! We are writing with news of the latest developments in our small Triratna sangha in Missoula. The new year brought some format changes in our center. As we've all probably experienced the ebb and flow of participation in sangha activities, it does create the need to tweak things from time to time. We are currently trying a new approach and holding Sangha Night once a month instead of the typical weekly get together. Each of our study groups takes the lead, on a rotation basis, in planning, preparing, and presenting a topic for Sangha Night. Needless to say, the competitive bar has been set. It's been wonderful to see the shrine room full again in support of one another. To fill in around the monthly Sangha Nights, Sarananda is currently teaching an eight-week meditation and Buddhism class. We are having an all-day practice day in June led by Varasuri and Saramati who will be presenting the topic of *Buddhist Psychology - What It Is (and Isn't)* over a three-week period in July.

In April, we had a weekend meditation retreat on Flathead Lake, which is about an hour and a half from Missoula. Sarananda led the retreat with support from Sthirada-



Front row, left to right: Abigail Eyer, Loren Dill, Janet Bowker, Eric Estes. **Back row, left to right:** Jonathan Marquis, Kay Jones, Sthiradasa, Sarananda, Tim Skufca, Peter Kurisoo, Stella White. Ann Campbell also attended.

sa. See the whole gang in the photo above.

On May 2, Janet Bowker had her mitra ceremony. Sadhu!!! Varasuri led the ceremony in conjunction with a Buddha Day puja. Lots of laughter and goodies rounded out the evening.

It is an interesting and exciting time for us here as we figure out how to meet the needs of new people coming through the door, support each other, and personally take our practice deeper.

~ Kay Jones

VANCOUVER TRIRATNA (VANCOUVER, BC, CANADA)

I am happy to be sharing, for the first time, recent news from the Triratna Vancouver sangha out on the west coast of British Columbia, Canada, through the medium of Aryaloka's *Vajra Bell* newsletter.

As some of you will know, after several years with two Order members offering their sterling service in this part of the country, both Upakarin and I have been joined by the dynamic presence of Dharmachari Vimalasara, originally from the

LBC in London, UK.

Now a resident of B.C., she has both embraced and enhanced our centre activities in a very positive way.

Instigating and leading an ongoing *Recovery Mondays* class which focuses on providing support for people recovering from addictions, Vimalasara has also breathed new life into our mitra sangha, having officially taken on the role of Vancouver mitra convenor.

This year has seen two people enter the mitra sangha – Ross Boyd and Liesl Glover.

Following a year of planning, I am pleased to say our Spring retreat at the Sea-

to-Sky Retreat Centre near Whistler was a tremendous success – in no small part due to the inspiring qualities and skills of Bodhipaksa, who agreed to lead the retreat. We set the maximum number of participants at twenty-five, and a month before the May retreat date, we were fully booked with three people on a wait list! We were happy to be joined by a good number of people from Seattle.

We are looking forward to promoting the next retreat in this region, to be held in September at Sun Lakes State Park, WA, in conjunction with the Triratna Seattle sangha.

~ Dharmachari Dayasiddhi

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

ARYALOKA SANGHA
(NEWMARKET, NH)

The community at Aryaloka continues to grow and provide spiritual friendship and education for people of all ages and interests. There is truly something for everyone within this community of care and

compassion! Opportunities to learn about the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha occur each Tuesday night after group meditations. Other opportunities for spending quality time, meditative practice, or just plain old fun and fellowship have taken place in many of the following activities which you may know or have heard about:

- Field trips to Boston museums

- Family hiking in nearby New Hampshire state parks
- Artistic meditative practices
- Gardening and adorning the many shrines on our property
- Celebrating the Triratna community throughout the world
- Making pasta together and enjoying a

continued on page 18

Men's Practice Days Planned Through October

Our monthly Men's Practice Days at Aryaloka have been going strong, with a variety of topics being offered and great participation by the men's sangha.

Open to men of all experience levels — from newcomer at Aryaloka to seasoned Order member — these events are an excellent opportunity to explore specific Buddhist topics, strengthen sitting practice, and build spiritual friendships and closer connections with other men.

In April, Bodhipaksa and Eric Wentworth offered an in-depth study on the Satipatthana Sutta which inspired some very intense and broad discussion, and deeply engaged the whole group. We took a break in May and came back in June with a fantastic day of meditation and artistic reflection. Arjava and Barry Timmerman guided two sits, followed by a chance to use a whole host of artistic media to express

the essence of our meditative experiences. Then we were treated with handmade pasta and sauce for lunch!

Moving into the summer months, we have lots to look forward to:

On July 7th, Nagabodhi, the president of our center and Public Preceptor to Stephen Sloan, will be joining us for Men's Day from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. That afternoon, at 2:00 p.m., he will be officiating Stephen's public ordination ceremony. Nagabodhi has offered to give us a morning introduction to the ceremony, and hold a discussion on Going for Refuge and ordination - a very rich opportunity to discuss these topics with an Order member who's very involved in the men's ordination process in North America.

Be sure not to miss the chance to see Stephen Sloan's ordination and be there to

give him your support as he enters a new phase of his spiritual life! Stephen will be the first male Order member in our local sangha to be ordained in many years, so there's much to celebrate! Sadhu, Stephen!

On August 12th, Frank Gladu will be leading a "just practice" day where the men will be able to gather and sit together in the shrine room for meditation, followed by segments of reflection as a group and sharing of our experiences on the cushion.

After the summer months, on **September 9th**, Bodhipaksa and Eric Wentworth will lead a day exploring insight meditation, and the **October 6th** day will be led by Vidhuma and Perry Blass - topic to be determined.

So, men, put these days on your calendars and join us for some spiritually-oriented male bonding!

meditation marathon

Continued from Page 4

jjw10@comcast.net

Here's how you can help:

Sign up! Our goal is 100% participation from Order members and mitras, and as many friends as possible. And you can encourage others to join as well - anyone interested in meditation and/or Aryaloka is welcome to attend!

Volunteer! There's plenty to do, so contact any of us or call the office if you'd like to be a part of this exciting event!

If you have questions or comments, please contact the co-chairs. Thanks in advance for your support of Aryaloka's 2012 Meditation Marathon!

~ Tom Gaillard, Treasurer

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.

By Steve Cardwell

Greetings and good wishes from Buddhaworks, the bookstore at Aryaloka. We will be talking about Sangharakshita's books in this issue of the *Vajra Bell*. This founder of The Triratna Buddhist Order and Community has written over forty books about Buddhism, his experiences along the path of the Dharma, and his creation of a worldwide Buddhist organization.

Urgyen Sangharakshita (Dennis Lingwood) was born on August 26, 1925 in Tooting, South London. Sangharakshita read voraciously as a child and at the age of sixteen encountered the *Diamond Sutra*, which radically changed the whole course of his life. He said, "I was, in fact, a Buddhist and always had been."

Sangharakshita was posted by the British Army to India during WWII. Following his service in India he stayed on and "went forth into homelessness," following the example of the Buddha. He spent the next twenty-five years in India studying, teaching, and writing extensively on Buddhism.

Triratna Buddhist Order members from the eastern U.S. have been very kind to share with us their comments about

some of their favorite books written by Sangharakshita.

Our grateful thanks goes out to Karunasara, Bodhipaksa, Thiradhamma, Kiranada, and Sravaniya for their inspiring words about books by Sangharakshita that have made a difference in their spiritual lives.

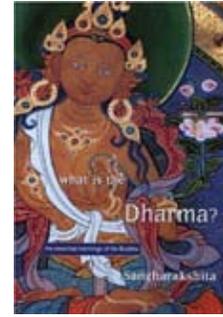
A Guide to the Buddhist Path

"This is the first Sangharakshita book for many of us. This book introduced many of the teachings, myths, and fundamental ideals of Buddhism. Sections on the Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha, and the Path of Regular Steps through morality, meditation, and wisdom cover all the fundamentals and with some lovely graphics as well." ~ Dh. Kiranada

"A *Guide to the Buddhist Path* really opened my eyes to how mythic episodes in the life of the Buddha could be seen as profound spiritual teachings expressed in symbolic language." ~ Dh. Bodhipaksa

What is the Dharma?

"This is a very useful overview of the Dharma. It is written in language that is



easily read and understood. I found it a useful explanation of the basics of the Dharma and the early teachings of the Buddha when I was early in my practice. It not only gave me an overview of the

teachings of the Buddha, but also a view of the focus of Sangharakshita's approach to practice. I still find it a useful reference book because of these qualities. I recommend this book for people who are interested in an overview of the Buddha's early teachings and how they are pertinent to our lives today." ~ Dh. Karunasara

The Essential Sangharakshita

"The index of *The Essential Sangharakshita* is my first stop when researching any aspect of the Dharma."

~ Dh. Thiradhamma

Facing Mount Kanchenjunga

"I love biographies and autobiographies

continued on page 9

Buddhaworks

The Aryaloka Bookstore

- * Meditation Candles
- * DVDs from Pema Chodron and Lama Surya Das
- * Meditation Journals
- * CDs from Thich Nhat Hanh
- * Singing Bowls
- * Brass Door Chimes from Nepal and India
- * Books by Sangharakshita
- * Lots and Lots of Great Books!

Your support brightens Aryaloka's future.

Buddhaworks is located at the Aryaloka Buddhist Center



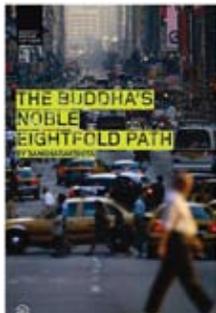
Please be sure Aryaloka's windows stay closed in winter and remember to close them when leaving the center in warmer months. Thank you!

buddhaworks

Continued from Page 8

as a way to step inside a person and see life unfolding through their own eyes. I have read all Bhante's biographies and *Facing Mount Kanchenjunga*, which covers fourteen years in the northeast Indian hill town of Kalimpong, is a favorite, being rich and full. It covers the early years beginning in 1950 when Sangharakshita was left there by his teacher Kashyapji and told to work for the Dharma, and that the local Newars would look after him. His developing relationships with Lama Govinda, Dhardo Rimpoche, Khantipalo, and many others are all there. It is a true snapshot of Buddhism in the fifties and early sixties in India and of Bhante's story." ~ Dh. Kiranada

The Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path



"Luckily for me, my first encounter with Sangharakshita was the series of eight taped lectures on the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path which in its transcription became known as the book

Vision and Transformation — now published as *The Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path*. I'm not a scholar, but I'd like to venture that this is one of the very greatest expositions of basic Dharma that exists. Why? It's very readable, it's very easy to understand (even if, as Bhante says, hard to put into practice!) and consequently very inspiring. It discusses the very foundations of what it means to be an individual who is aspiring to live a life ever more imbued with awareness, con-

tentment, generosity, wisdom and so on. But the language is so direct and simple that one comes away believing that yes, of course it's true — what the Buddha attained I too can attain. The book has some wonderful stories, my favorite being the Zen tale of the young wastrel who discovers he has both concentration and compassion within him. The chapters on Perfect Emotion and Perfect Speech especially have profoundly influenced the course of my life and practice. I never tire of re-reading this work and my own copy is fondly and gratefully worn and faded."

~ Dh. Sravaniya

The Drama of Cosmic Enlightenment

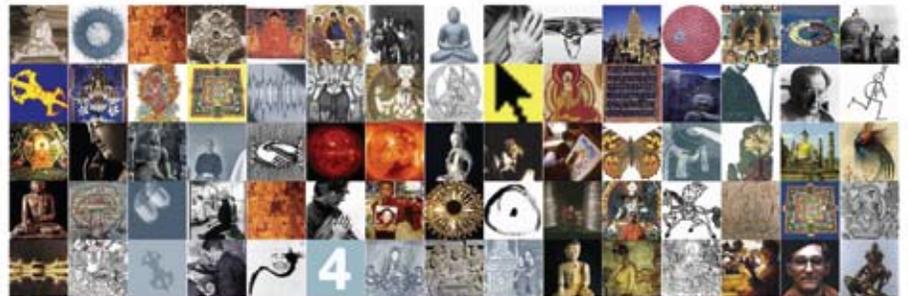
"I used to have a distaste for what I considered the over-abundant and exces-

sive language and imagery of Mahayana scriptures. After some months of mitra study on *The Drama of Cosmic Enlightenment*, however, all that changed and I was a convert. Nowadays if I'm feeling a lack of energy or inspiration it's usually a Mahayana text that I will turn to, to set matters right — the *White Lotus Sutra* or the *Flower Ornament Scripture* or Shantideva.

Perhaps the most significant thing I got from Sangharakshita's discussion of the *White Lotus Sutra* was the sense and possibility of immeasurable emancipation that is available to each of us.

My whole sense of life and the spiritual quest were irrevocably widened and enriched as a result. I imagine that for many eons of kalpas this will still be one of the best introductions to the *White Lotus Sutra* and the Mahayana."

~ Dh. Sravaniya



Discover the Dharma a thousand times.



freebuddhistaudio.com

Buddhist resources for the modern world

dharma talks online audio-books podcasts ethics poetry study resources
arts community spaces connection buddhist wisdom getting involved



clearvision

Audio-visual resources
exploring Buddhism

www.clear-vision.org

A System of Practice

One of Sangharakshita's central teachings, the implications of which are being explored in some depth currently within our community, is the Triratna System of Practice. The System outlines a recognizable pattern in Buddhist spiritual development that consists of five distinct stages – Integration, Positive Emotion, Spiritual Death, Spiritual Rebirth, and Spontaneous Action. The Vajra Bell is fortunate to have had the opportunity to sit down with Dhammarati for an in-depth discussion of the System of Practice:

Interview by Eric Wentworth

Eric Wentworth - Could you give a brief outline of the System of Practice for anyone who doesn't know it or who hasn't had experience with it before?

Dhammarati - The first source of it in Triratna was a lecture that Bhante gave in March of 1978 called *A System of Meditation*, and it outlines what he described as “perhaps a trifle ambitiously - a system.” So, he was aware himself that it was kind of provisional, something that was still taking shape.

To understand what it's for, to get a sense of why he thought it was necessary, you have to imagine that this was the late 70's. People had been practicing for about ten years, and there were probably something like twenty-odd meditation practices current within the movement. You know, everything from Mindfulness of Breathing through the Root Verses of the Bardos, contemplation of impermanence in various ways, the Brahma Viharas, various visualization practices - so quite a range of practices.

Bhante says in the lecture that he was trying to do two things. First, he was trying to show how the different meditation practices hung together, how these different practices related to each other. And secondly he was trying to describe how they were part of a progressive structure, a progressive system, a path to move from



continued on page 11



system of practice

Continued from Page 10

your first engagement with meditation and to work in a way that sets up the conditions that let your experience deepen. So, I think those are the two intentions. How do the practices hang together, and how do you take them deeper? I think basically, that's what he was trying to talk about.

It's interesting just looking at the buildup to Bhante's thinking. Before the *System of Meditation* lecture there was a seminar on a Nagarjuna text called the *Precious Garland*, and Bhante did a little sidetrack during one of the study sessions. He talked about what he called the Five Great Stages of the spiritual life, which obviously anticipate what he talked about in the later lecture. There were a couple of things I found interesting about that: one was that the "Five Great Stages" apply more widely than just meditation: they apply to the whole of our practice, the whole of our lives. And secondly, Bhante explicitly related the Five Great Stages back to the Five Spiritual Faculties.

What you've got with the Five Spiritual Faculties is one of the earliest descriptions of what a well-rounded, maturing spiritual practice looks like. Any maturing spiritual practice, any maturing spiritual experience, is going to have an element of deepening mindfulness in it. Any deepening spiritual practice is going to have an element of increasing positive emotion. So, the Five Spiritual Faculties are one way to describe the main elements of deepening spiritual experience. So, the System of Practice, if you're asking where it came from, has its roots in those very early Pali Canon teachings on the Five Spiritual Faculties. It's trying to look at the main elements of spiritual experience and trying to describe the practices that support and deepen each of them.

Just to spell out the links, Bhante makes a connection between the Spiritual Faculty of **Mindfulness** and, in the System of Practice, the stage of **Integration**. The Integration stage is when you're starting to take awareness into your experience, starting to connect your experience - you're feeling what your body does, what you feel emotionally, what your mind's doing, you're starting to notice your experience round and about you - and all of that is starting to be included in your awareness in a joined up, integrated way. So, Mindfulness in the Spiritual Faculties becomes Integration in the System of Practice - maybe trying to unpack a bit more the significance of Mindfulness in our experience.

Sraddha, the second of the Five Spiritual Faculties, corresponds to **Positive Emotion** in the System of Practice. And that would cover everything from your mind starting to calm down a little bit as you check in with your experience, up through the *dhyana* factors like *piti* and *sukha*. You're moving away from very self-referential mental states and into more open, more positive, more responsive mental states. You're becoming more aware of other people, so you're entering into *metta*, *mudita*, *karuna*, and things like that. So, the Spiritual Faculty of **Sraddha** becomes that development of positive emotion.

Eric - And you're developing more confidence in your own practice in that stage, in a sense - seeing that it's working and that you're engaged in a positive endeavor by practicing?

Dhammarati - Yes, that's *sraddha* in the sense of confidence there, although I think in a sense that growing confidence applies to all of the stages. You can see people gradually find their feet

within their practice, gradually start to see the deeper possibilities within each of the stages.

Moving on to **Prajna** as the next Spiritual Faculty, the real core of *prajna* in the Buddhist tradition is this experience of insight. The Pali Canon talks about it in terms of the *lakshanas*: *anitya*, *anatta*, and *dukkha*. So you're seeing the impermanence of things, and you're seeing that the way we think of ourselves as something fixed and separate doesn't really fit the experience, so that becomes the stage of **Spiritual Death** in the System of Practice - maybe a more evocative, less abstract way of describing that letting go of a fixed self-view.

And then you have the link made with **Samadhi** as a Spiritual Faculty. Bhante takes **Samadhi** to mean that one's deepening spiritual experience gradually becomes transformative, it starts to fill your whole being. In the System of Practice that's talked about in terms of **Spiritual Rebirth**. So, it's that idea of something intensely positive, but less self-referential emerging into our awareness.

For **Virya**, the last of the Five Spiritual Faculties, there's a lovely link made in the seminar where Bhante talks about it as **Spontaneous Action** for the benefit of others. That less self-referential framework, it's spontaneous, because it's not so self-directed, and it's more responsive to other people. This stage refers to that idea that *virya*, which sometimes gets translated as effort, isn't this sort of spiritual "gritting your teeth and getting down to it," but it's the flower of a deepening practice and a spontaneous activity of your mind a bit more awake. In the System of Practice, Bhante links it to Just Sitting, in the sense of a more receptive, spontaneous, less consciously directed element in our practice.

It made quite a difference to me when I realized the link between the System of Practice and the Five Spiritual Faculties, because it means that you're not looking at something that's an arbitrary system. You're looking at something really fundamental within spiritual experience, and looking at the conditions that support each of those central qualities - what you need for those qualities to develop. That's the root of the system.

Eric - Often the System of Practice speaks about meditations that go along with the system, like *Mindfulness of Breathing in the Integration stage*, and *Metta Bhavana in the Positive Emotion stage*...

Dhammarati - I think it's important to come at that carefully. A lot of people these days, including myself, hear the word "system" and react a bit like "wait a minute." You don't want to be systematized. I was reading one of my old talks on this topic, and I remembered a metaphor that I had mentioned. A couple of years ago, my friend Vassika was showing me some mosaics that she had done that used a very old method that came from Ravenna in the 2nd or 3rd century AD, and what they used to do is use broken tiles. And using broken tiles meant that the whole surface was very irregular and very alive. In modern mosaic, they tend to use square-cut bits of tile, all of them flat, and it's much, much less interesting, much less vital when you look at these tiles put together in predictable ways. So, first of all, just a wee note of caution that in the idea of a system you're not trying to impose anything on people's experience. It's just trying to articulate something that's quite naturally unfolding and looking at the conditions behind it. So, it's not a rigid structure. And Bhante was very explicit about that in one of his seminars that he did with private Preceptors at Madhyamaloka. He said:

continued on page 12

system of practice

Continued from Page 11

The system is not meant to be a rigid system, with carefully defined boundaries. Each stage is meant to cover a vast range of experience and practices... For example in the second stage, the stage of positive emotion, there can be joy, ecstasy, bliss, compassion: everything that's of an emotionally positive nature, from ordinary positivity to sublime spiritual experience. One shouldn't think of these stages in too narrow a sense...

And he goes on to talk about the practices that would support that. Like you said, in the stage of positive emotion, you have Metta Bhavana practice, but you also can have ritual practice, you can have art and poetry, friendship - there are going to be a lot of different practices that support that experience of positive emotion. So, I think it's quite important to make a distinction between that central quality of positive emotion and trying not to too narrowly identify it with a single practice.

Having said that, I think there are good reasons why it's valuable to focus on particular practices. So, the Buddhist tradition makes probably literally hundreds or thousands of practices available. But, actually, most of us are only going to have the time to become skilled in a small number of them. At some point you need to choose. So, in terms of your own practice, having had some experience of different practices, you need to start to build up the kind of subtlety and depth that comes from real sustained practice of just a few practices.

So, I think for that reason, at some point you need to choose, and in the movement we use some of the most central practices from the tradition, like Mindfulness of Breathing or Metta Bhavana, as ways of supporting that deepening experience. I think also, if you're part of a community, if there are shared practices, it means the experience can get passed on more easily if people are working within the same framework - they're working with the same meditation practices. It makes it all a bit simpler for us to learn from other experienced practitioners.

So, within the Movement there tends to be a characteristic practice for each of the stages - for Positive Emotion it would be Metta Bhavana - but you'll also find people doing the other Brahma Viharas, you'll find people doing the Tonglen practice, the Bo-

dhicitta practice, you'll find people doing ritual practice. So even within the System, although there are real characteristic practices, there's also a range. You don't want to be too mechanistic about it. You want something that's really effective for the individual practitioner, but with enough common ground to let them be part of a practice community and build skills.

Eric - *So, an awareness that there are some key practices that are very helpful in supporting the different stages, but not falling into the idea that that's all that there is - more of a recognition of that overall stage of development in one's spiritual life?*

Dhammarati - Exactly.

Eric - *Picking up on that theme of passing on practices, in one of your talks you noted that it's important to have confidence in your system of training and to preserve the frameworks of a spiritual tradition and pass them on in full, even when they may not be personally what you practice. I was wondering if you could talk a bit about that?*

Dhammarati - If you don't mind, I'll give a bit of background first. I was remembering some of the study that we did in the Preceptors' College in the last couple of years, that led up to the recent papers released in the Triratna Community. One of the texts we were looking at was the *Cetokhila Sutta*. In the *Cetokhila Sutta* the Buddha lays out five things that are necessary for the "release of the heart" - that's how I think the text talks about it. It talks about it in terms of confidence in the teacher, in the teaching, in the sangha, in the discipline, and in the companions in the spiritual life, and the Buddha puts it very strongly. If that confidence isn't there, he says, "the mind does not incline to ardour, devotion, perseverance, and striving." And so, "that the heart, should come to growth... - that is impossible."

So, to take the Buddha seriously, we need confidence in the practices we do as a condition for growth to be possible, it seems.

Buddhism never asks for blind faith. But practically, if you're confident that change is possible, you're more likely to engage with your practice with a sort of openness, curiosity, and confidence that makes growth more likely. So, I think one of the things about the tradition is that it doesn't ask for unrealistic confidence - you're not

asked for blind faith, but, you're asked first of all to have a kind of open-minded, critical engagement with something.

And confidence builds up with experience. You know, you understand how to take awareness into your body, and you notice that your body calms and relaxes. After some time you build up confidence in that. Because you've got some experience, you've got a basis for confidence and a sort of receptivity to what naturally grows from the practice. So, the confidence itself is one of the conditions that allows for a whole-hearted engagement with practice that makes deeper change easier.

So, from a really pragmatic point of view, confidence in the Dharma is confidence that change is possible, confidence that certain conditions will support that change. It's not random; if you act out of kindness, your relationships on the whole are going to be more connected and more harmonious and less polarized than acting out of intention to harm - there's a definite shape to it. And as you build up confidence, you're more likely to act in ways that express that state of mind and express that intention.

Then the *Cetokhila Sutta* starts to get more specific. So, it starts with the importance of confidence in the Dharma, but then it goes on to say you need confidence in the *sikkha*, the training. So what's the difference? The training, if you like, is the specific shape that the Dharma takes in your own practice. One of the points that Bhante makes is that the Dharma needs to be made specific for a specific sangha. You could even say that the Dharma needs to be specific for a specific individual.

So, if you've tested your practices a little bit, if you're broadly confident, from your own engagement with the practices, that they do what the tradition says they're going to do, you're going to engage with them. If you get beyond the point where you're hesitating, and you're confident and able to attend to what's emerging in your practice, then that experience is going to stabilize and deepen. That kind of confidence makes the experience more likely to arise and to deepen. So, from a real pragmatic point of view, confidence has an effect.

The second thing, in terms of "passing practices on in full," I think that's a wee bit different. I think that becomes more important, perhaps, when you're teaching than when you're practicing. As a practitioner, you want to be intelligently crit-

continued on page 13

system of practice

Continued from Page 12

ical about what you take from the Dharma. I remember Bhante saying that a lot of the Pali Canon are records of a dialogue, a communication between the Buddha and another individual. And some of what's said is going to be pertinent to you as an individual, and some of it's not. It wasn't always communication for the whole of humanity, it was a communication to that person at that time. So, you're not asked to take the whole tradition on wholesale or uncritically.

But there are certain key teachings that really are important, and of value for everyone. And some of these we'll naturally take to and some we won't take to, sort of temperamentally. And I think one of the important things about receptivity to the tradition is not to write off too quickly those things we don't so naturally respond to, and to have a willingness to imagine for a minute that there might be something in those teachings that's of significance - that we haven't yet seen.

Let me use you as an example, rather than having you act as an audience - so are there bits of the practice that you would naturally take to?

Eric - Sure. I tend to naturally take to the Bodhisattva Ideal and to Mindfulness practice. Mindfulness of Breathing is key for me. Finding that center, bringing awareness to the moment, bringing myself into the gap.

Dhammarati - And this may be a harder question, but are there bits of the tradition that you less naturally go to, that are not so naturally an obvious fit?

Eric - Yes, when I first encountered puja practice, for instance, that was a difficult thing to get into right away. But, as you were saying, when you try it on to see if it will fit, even though it might not be your preference, sometimes you develop a deeper affinity for it or an understanding of it that you wouldn't have expected.

Dhammarati - Right, so what came out of it for you? When you started to do it, what happened?

Eric - For me, I developed a greater openness to myth and symbol - it opened up a more devotional aspect of my practice, rather than simply an intellectual one.

Dhammarati - And does that do something that, for example, the Mindfulness of Breathing doesn't do?

Eric - Well, it depends. Mindfulness of Breathing can have something of those elements in it sometimes, but it's generally much more focused on the awareness aspect rather than the development of devotion or emotion.

Dhammarati - That's a good concrete example of it. To go back to the Five Spiritual Faculties, I think probably what's true for most people is that some of those faculties are more easily, naturally developed than others. So, for me, for example, Mindfulness of Breathing is so much my temperament and bias. So, left to my own devices, I will tend to do Mindfulness of Breathing.

One of the things that the Five Spiritual Faculties and the System of Practice is saying is that there are a range of qualities that make a up full spiritual experience. So, for example, the System of Practice just reminds me that one of the things I need to check is that there's a deepening element of positive emotion in my practice. I need to check that I'm not getting too identified with or too possessive around my experiences, that it doesn't become a kind of subtle egotism.

So, receptivity to the System as a whole takes your attention into those areas which need to be developed, but where you don't so easily and naturally go. You're able to work with your strengths, but you're also able to take attention to those areas that are less developed and to give attention to them. So, it does have implications for practice. And I think it's particularly got implications if you're a teacher, because the people that you're teaching don't necessarily share your biases.

I remember watching a teacher in the Tibetan tradition teach some Gampopa and it was very interesting watching it. He was teaching the section of the Jewel Ornament of Liberation where Gampopa goes into detail about the hells, and this teacher made it clear that he did not find this a personally helpful teaching. He wasn't sure that anyone else in the room was going to find it a helpful teaching. But as far as he was concerned, he was passing on the teaching of someone whose experience was deeper than his own, and he had a responsibility to pass on the whole teaching,

and not let it be filtered through his personal preferences. I think there's something important there about your relationship to the tradition, where there's a sort of fidelity to what the Buddha tried to teach, or for our community what Bhante tried to teach, and trying not to just have it come through the filter what we personally respond to. I think that kind of receptivity to the Buddha's experience, and in terms of us as practitioners and in terms of us passing that teaching on, that has implications - I think we've got a responsibility.

Eric - As a teacher it seems that you would want to hold the whole tradition so that whatever might be of use to someone else, to a student, that you would be making it available to them.

Dhammarati - Right. And I think that means having enough receptivity to be able to get a feel for it and pass on some live experience behind it. I think one of the real benefits of being involved in teaching the Dharma is that it nudges us past our personal preferences, and makes us look more freshly at parts of the Dharma we don't so naturally respond to.

I think maybe the crucial thing about the System is that you're looking at all of these essential Five Faculties. Bhante refers to this in his *Precious Garland* seminar:

It means that everyday one has got five things to practice as best you can:

1. *one has to keep up the effort to be mindful and aware and to be as integrated as possible;*
2. *one remains in as positive a mental state as one possibly can;*
3. *one does not lose sight of one's ultimate goal at any time;*
4. *one tries to apply at every level whatever you've realised or discovered on the highest level of your being;*
5. *and you do your best for other people, you do what you can to help people.*

This is your spiritual life and this is your spiritual practice. These are the things with which you are basically concerned. On the practical side, this is all that you really need. You don't need to worry about how deep you've gone, or what stage you're at - if you're covering those five areas, in a sense

continued on page 18

Merging Practice and the Arts at Aryaloka

Spring folds into summer, and the vibrant community at Aryaloka is blooming like the garden, with many new ones venturing up Heartwood Circle looking for meditation, Dharma talks, and a sangha connection. The arts are a vital part of the fabric of our sangha, helping to deepen our practice, enrich our lives and our dedication to the Three Jewels.

In June we were very glad to go deeper into active meditation, dropping expectation, grasping, and judgment in our *Shodo: The Way of the Brush* class. With this workshop we welcomed five new visitors who had not been to Aryaloka before, as well as some familiar friends. Attendees called the day, "challenging and inspiring," and men-

tioned a love of "exploring this connection between art, meditation and practice."

Our Triratna founder, Urgyen Sangharakshita, had a strong connection with and appreciation for the arts, and reported his struggles in his twenties with what he called "Sangharakshita I," the renunciant, reclusive monk-meditator, and "Sangharakshita II," the lover of beauty and poetry. It is to our great benefit that he found a way to integrate the arts and the spiritual life, celebrating art as "an expansion of consciousness with a heightened awareness that can take us beyond boundaries of self." You will find many volumes of Bhante's poetry in our extensive library, and at the Center a welcoming Aryalo-

ka Poetry Group meets regularly to read, share, or just listen.

In the fall we have Barbara Steiner returning to lead one of her very successful *Writer's Voice* workshops, on September 30. And we look forward to two exceptional exhibitions that will be hanging in our Yoga Room Gallery from October through mid-December. **Earth, Water, Fire: Photography by Rebekah Younger** will be showing from October 5 to November 14. Rebekah practices under the Shambala Buddhist tradition. And our own Dh. Akashavanda will be showing her quilted wallhangings in **The Stitch-fold Path: Coloring the Buddha** from November 18 to December 18. ~ Dh. Kiranada

Sangha Members Visit Sackler Museum Exhibit

By Elizabeth Hellard

The spirit of community was in full bloom on March 24th as thirteen members of the sangha took a road trip to the Arthur M. Sackler Museum in Cambridge, MA. The Sackler Museum is one of several museums in the Harvard Art Museum complex. We started the day with lunch at Casablanca on Brattle Street in Cambridge. We dined on enticing Mediterranean cuisine at this neighborhood Harvard Square restaurant. We did our best to sample the entire menu by selecting all of the offerings from the "Small Bites" menu. We passed dishes from one to another and shared the delicious meal as our conversation overlapped from topic to topic.

When lunch was finished we walked to the Sackler Museum. On our way to the museum we passed a group of monks enjoying a walking meditation through the Harvard campus. The monks were part of the Thich Nhat Hanh sangha. This sangha has a strong presence in Cambridge and it's not unusual to see a group of monks in silent walking meditation.

We arrived at the museum a bit early and had a chance to briefly tour the special Ancient and Contemporary Arts exhibits. At 2:30 we met Shirley, our docent who would be our guide through the Asian & Islamic Arts section. Shirley has been associated with the Harvard Museums for over forty years and was extremely knowledgeable about Asian art and Buddhist iconography. Once Shirley realized she had an audience that was familiar with the Buddhist figures and history she was able to go into greater detail. She appreciated and enjoyed having an audience that was knowledgeable about Buddhist art and tradition.

The Sackler Museum's Department of Asian Art is responsible



for approximately 20,000 works that span more than 7,000 years, from Neolithic times to the present, and hail from a broad range of Asian civilizations. It houses the institution's largest most diverse collections, ranging from East Asian folding screens and scroll paintings to prints, ceramics, sculpture, metalwork, lacquers and textiles. The collection also includes sculptures and wall paintings of the Buddha and other significant figures described in Buddhist texts plus objects and paintings used in daily life.

It was truly an enjoyable day. On my way home in the car I was thinking that this is what sangha is all about. Yes, we meditate and study together, but getting together socially to take a day

continued on page 16

Contemplative Arts - *Shodo: The Way of the Brush*

On Sunday, June 3, Kiranada hosted eight people in a contemplative art meditative experience. *Shodo* is a Japanese art form where one has the opportunity to quiet him/herself and to become sensitive to the brush, and allow the black ink to flow to paper. It was an opportunity to reflect on one's true state of mind. Participants thoroughly enjoyed this experience and hope that more like it will be offered in the future.

Neil Harvey, a resident of North Hampton and senior producer and host of the public radio series *The Bioneers: Revolution From the Heart of Nature* loved the class. He had recently discovered a Japanese ink stone hidden away in his great-grandmother's attic, so this was a serendipitous opportunity to explore the technique. He offers this writing and artwork to the Vajra Bell, inspired by the workshop:

Flying White

Two feet on the floor.
 Posture erect.
 A bamboo handled paint brush poised in your right hand.
 Wait.
 Look.
 In preparation, you sat, in an eager group of eight, eyes closed, guided meditation, focusing your minds from the top of



the head, down the face, left arm to fingers, right arm to fingers, chest, belly, legs, feet.

"Notice the breath. Notice a tingling energy in the fingers?"

Rice paper, gossamer white, resting on felt.

It is an open field.

Open.

Rest.

Balance on two feet. On the floor.

Dip the brush in black ink.

Groom the point, charge the bristles.

Wait.

Observe the top, middle and bottom of the white field.

A breath.

In preparation, your eyes closed, one hand on ball point pen, one hand feeling the edges of your index card, you wrote repeating, automatic, blind to outcome, attentive to each letter, (and those calls of the grasping, judging, commenting mind) repeating: "opening heart" or "be here now"

or "Om Mani Padme Hum."

Surrender. Arrival.

The brush is perpendicular to the page.

Equipoise.

You plant it.

With full body, shoulder, arm, hand and fingers, move the brush.

Left to right.

Follow the brush.

Followfollowfollowfollowfollow through to the end and...finish.

Hide the finish with a light return stroke.

Lift the brush.

It's a line!

For our beginning class, this first line becomes "ichi" - the number 1 in Japanese.

And each stroke, each line or mere dot, we discover, can have so many characteristics, so many meanings.

Our guide, Kiranada Benjamin, demonstrates again. She plants her feet, raises

continued on page 16

Buddhism & Arts Tour of Japan Planned for 2013

An Artist Tour for Buddhists, a Buddhist Tour for Artists. Join us for an enormously rich experience - thirteen nights in Japan during the peak of next year's cherry blossom season, April 12-26, 2013.

After eighteen years in Japan and a return to the USA ten years ago, it has been a dream of mine to share the country and its Buddhist arts with my Aryaloka friends. I have organized textile tours for many of my art students, but here, at last, is a Buddhist Art Tour for you. Called "a trip of a lifetime," this special tour will center on Kyoto, the cultural, religious, and artistic center of Japan for 1,200 years. With my own intimate knowledge of many

continued on page 16



poetry corner

Dr. Suess Learns To Meditate

By Barry Timmerman

The cat in the hat is on the mat, imagine that!
Breathing in, breathing out,
counting breaths, transforming doubts.

The cat's mind boards a thought plane,
takes a journey to a thought plain, finds
a training station, what a fine sensation!

The cat wonders what place is this, as
his mind is filled with sensations of bliss
then realizes what he's missed.

The cat boards a thought train,
takes a journey where his thoughts are trained to remain
sustained on breathing in, breathing out.

The cat's mind reminds his mind to stay behind,
breathing in, breathing out,
The cat's mind finds another thought plane.

The cat's off again, from a plane, to a plain,
To a place of bliss, to realizing what he's missed,
then a train, to a place to be trained to sustain
attention on breathing in, breathing out.
Oh, the places you'll go!

Morning Hindrances

By Kavyadrishti

Bananas this week thirty nine cents a pound,
more attractive than last week when forty nine cents a pound,
an attribute of craving, complicated by an economic system
founded on greed.
The avocado went from ninety nine to one twenty nine.
Surely it will ripen too late, or too soon, or not at all if I eat it to-
day.
And even this, like choosing a dish-washing soap,
adds to the list of conditions that cause new conditions to arise.
Quiet at last, my body at rest, one hand supporting the other,
I discover what was unheard over the din of avocados, bananas,
and the eggs from caged hens.
I listen, but the wailing begins again, and soon I cannot.
This being, this right here, right now,
that will become. And what I said yesterday to Sarah
is echoing in the wind.
My right shoulder aches, my left leg longs to be restless.
But I paid extra to get the hens out of the cage.
Isn't that enough?

sackler museum

Continued from Page 14

trip is just simply lovely. It was interesting to see what part of the exhibit appealed to one sangha member and some completely different object in the exhibit would excite another. A simple trip to a museum, standing next to one another discussing color and texture, is a glimpse into a part of our friends that we don't usually get a chance to see. ~
Elizabeth Hellard

japan tour 2013

Continued from Page 15

special and awe-inspiring places, I hope to slip you into temples, rock gardens, artists' studios, hot mountain springs, a Zen *Sesshin*, and *hondos* where we can view Buddhist national treasures.

We will reflect on Basho, Ryokan, and Buson's poetry at places where these poets walked centuries ago. The trip will culminate in a journey to the monasteries of sacred Mt. Koya where we can visit Kukai's mausoleum at the end of a deeply mean-

ingful walk through towering cedars.

I am so very pleased to be able to share these things with you, my Buddhist friends, and have worked to make it the most economical Japan tour that exists. This is the time to go.

If you would be interested in joining us, please contact me in the next month for a final daily schedule at kiranada@betsysterlingbenjamin.com or 603-642-3479 and together we'll take a step back into Buddhist history using the touchstone of Japan's contemplative arts.

~ *Dh. Kiranada*

shodo workshop

Continued from Page 15

the brush, pauses and in that pause – what is it? I imagine the lineage of teachers, sensei, masters, generation before generation, back, back, back attending to this pregnant moment.

We watch.

She plants the brush.

And is gone.

Left behind is an artifact. Evidence of a

moment lived with full awareness.

Ink and water on paper.

To the trained eye, like the practiced hand of the Asian doctor reading the smallest variations in the patient's pulses, each ink mark, wide, thin, jagged, smooth, solid, or streaked with "flying white," can reveal myriad indications of health or imbalance, peace or impatience, moodiness or metta.

But no matter the student's level of mastery, what remains, absorbed in the

rice fiber paper, is a thing of beauty. Perhaps, at its best, a trace of clarity, enlightened mind. All offered unattached, selfless, full-hearted into the sea of samsara.

Picasso once said, "Art blows the dust off of everyday life."

Shodo can blow the dust of distracted mind off the pristine view of this exquisite lucid moment.

Followfollowfollowfollowfollow...
Flow...

~ *Dh. Kiranada*

Living in the Realm of the Bodhisattva

Workshop to Explore the Role of a Devotional and Mythic Approach to the Spiritual Life

By Dh. Viriyagita

We are rational beings, and when the Dharma accords with our reason, we are deeply satisfied. We are emotional beings who are moved by beauty and are inspired by virtue and lofty ideals. We are imaginative beings who delight in myth and magic and stories that evoke heroic qualities.

I will lead a workshop from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on September 15th at Aryaloka, to explore the role and importance of myth, ritual, and devotion in the Buddhist context.

During a visit in June with my granddaughter, we created a myth involving fairies. I must admit that I do not know ex-

actly how fairies operate, so I took some license with the story. As my granddaughter carried out her duties as a “fairy lover” (one who believes in fairies and is dedicated to serving them and acquiring some of their powers), her eyes lit up with joy and wonder.

She spent the day making things for them, building a fairy house and protecting them. She learned of their powers to make peace and know the truth. She was excited to find that she already possessed some of these powers, and made a promise not to use any acquired powers to do bad deeds. We created a world infused with magic, beauty and devotion to a higher ideal.

In the September 15th workshop we will explore the meaning of the Bodhisattva Ideal — that is, to be one who pursues the path to Enlightenment not for one’s sake

alone, but for all sentient beings. We will look at some of the archetypal bodhisattva figures and the aspects of Enlightenment which they embody.

With guided meditation and exercises we will delve into our own personal myths. We will have a taste of what it might be like to live in the realm of the bodhisattva, living the journey to wisdom and compassion for the sake of all sentient beings. We will conclude with a *puja* of our own making.

My hope is that not only will the day be inspiring and fruitful, but that you will take with you some tools to continue to live in this magical, delightful realm in your daily life. May you continue this journey to wisdom and compassion for the sake of all beings!

For more details and to register go to the Aryaloka.org web site at <http://www.aryaloka.org/>.

Brahma Viharas Retreat to Awaken the Heart

By Dh. Arjava

Expand your love, joy, compassion, and sense of peace through meditation

If you enjoy the Metta Bhavana – or loving-kindness – meditation and would like to broaden your experience in this area, the Brahma Viharas meditation practices are the next step. A retreat focusing on these practices will be held September 28-30 at Aryaloka.

The Brahma Viharas are a series of meditation practices originally taught by the Buddha on four profound, yet accessible, states of mind:

- **Metta/Loving-Kindness:** Opening our hearts to ourselves and others;

extending our loving-kindness to all of humanity

- **Karuna/Compassion:** Meeting suffering and pain with love and compassion
- **Mudita/Joy:** Sharing one another’s joy; being truly happy when someone else has good fortune
- **Upekkha/Equanimity:** Maintaining inner peace in the face of the ever-changing vicissitudes of life

This is an intermediate-level retreat for people who already have a good understanding of the Metta Bhavana meditation practice.

The techniques of the other three Brahma Vihara meditation practices – the

Karuna Bhavana, Mudita Bhavana, and Upekkha Bhavana – will be taught. There will be opportunities ask questions and discuss one’s experiences about the Brahma Viharas in general and their associated meditation practices.

Spend the weekend expanding your love, joy, compassion, and sense of peace through meditation.

The weekend will be led by Karunasara and Arjava, who teach meditation and Buddhism. These practices have changed their lives, and they want to share them with you.

For more details and to register go to the Aryaloka.org web site at <http://www.aryaloka.org/>.

Living Joyously, Dying Peacefully: Reflections on the Death and Dying Series

By Dh. Karunasara

The Buddha taught that we are always in process through our births, our lives, and our deaths. As we come to understand this, we also learn the ways to release ourselves from fear and suffering. As part of this exploration and learning, a number of us just completed a three-part series of four-hour workshops focused on living

joyously and dying peacefully.

An important event in this process is the death of our body and the end of our existence as we know it on this earth. This causes fear and suffering for many of us as we lose all we know and suffer physical discomfort.

The first workshop explored death and dying from a Buddhist perspective. Understanding the meaning of death helps us

live our lives more fully. The second session focused on ways to support ourselves and others facing death or a terminal illness. The third workshop covered practical aspects of dying, including completing advanced directives that clarify the wishes for end-of-life care. All of the sessions included philosophical, spiritual, and practical aspects using a mixture of talks, meditation, reflection and personal sharing.

sangha notes

Continued from Page 7

- wonderful meal
- Full moon pujas and chanting
- Yoga classes
- Discussion groups on end of life issues
- Men's Days for reflection and meditation
- Women's Days for reflection and meditation
- Spring Clean-up Day
- Potluck meals and discussions
- Viewing a slideshow of several of our friends' trip to India with meaningful discussion

- Others, too numerous to mention!

We have recently recovered from a serious kitchen flood this spring. Thanks to many generous gifts of time, talent, energy, and perseverance, our facility is not only repaired, but "new and improved." We are so thankful to all who participated in this monumental project! Words can never begin to express our gratitude for your help in this endeavor.

As you will see mentioned in another article, the stupa kula has plans for fundraising and building a stupa to house the ashes of Dhardo Rinpoche, beloved Buddhist teacher. Our own Bodhilocana voiced this dream; which we hope to make

a reality in her memory.

We congratulate many of our community who have been, or will be ordained as members of the Triratna Order.

Kavyadristi, formerly known as Joan Rochette, recently received her kesa in a beautiful ceremony here at Arayoka. Her ordination ceremony was poignant, moving, and reverent. We all say "sadhū" and look forward to learning much from her example and wisdom. The following GFR mitras are scheduled for ordination in the very near future: Stephen Sloan, Candace Copp, Sheila Groomell, Debby Cardwell, and Marianne Hannigan.

continued on page 19

system of practice

Continued from Page 13

you've got a rounded practice. So one of the things that the System is trying to get you to do is to make sure that all of those areas are getting conscious attention and are consciously getting deepened.

Eric - *I like the dynamism of how Bhante puts that - it doesn't just apply to a rigid system, but it's something much more personalized.*

Dhammarati - Yes, and you can see that it applies to much more than just meditation practice.

Eric - *Since the time that you first encountered the System of Practice, how has your understanding and experience with it changed over time?*

Dhammarati - Let's hope it has, eh? [Laughs] Hmm... well, what can I usefully say? Well, with almost every retreat I go on, I feel like I've finally gotten a glimmer of what the practice is getting at. I think that's happened consistently for... thirty years? [Laughs] When I started doing the Mindfulness of Breathing, if I got to ten it was a real spiritual achievement - I really felt like I'd gotten somewhere. Most of the time my mind was all over the place.

More recently, Bhante was talking about the *Anapanasati Sutta*, the core text about the Mindfulness of Breathing, the range of awareness that the *Anapanasati Sutta* describes - those first moments of awareness and connection, taking you through the calming, *piti, sukha*. Then the mind starts to clarify, and you have the experience of

awareness when it's not so conditioned by craving and aversion. Then those moments of clear seeing of the nature of something - where you're looking at the impermanence of it, but not as an abstract idea. You're just attending to that experience of a living, fluid, open quality to all of your experience.

And I guess, all of the time you're in a dialogue with the tradition - you're in a dialogue with the Buddha. I remember Subhuti recently saying that even the Pali Suttas are the Buddha trying to describe his experience to us. And when you look at something like the *Anapanasati Sutta*, it's not just that you're reading a technical instruction. Actually what you've got is the Buddha trying to say, 'Look, this is what my experience of awareness is like.' And in practice you start to get little flavors, little glimmers, of what those communications are trying to describe. You know, nothing like as stable or as deep or as sustained as the Buddha's experience, but you definitely get past trying to get to ten. There are little moments of positive emotion, little moments of clarity, where you sort of see where the practice is starting to go, and it starts to stabilize and become more of a sustained experience.

Eric - *In that sense, do you feel that the System of Practice is a model that you've tended to work from, or one that you've looked at and recognized your own experience in? Or both?*

Dhammarati - Well, I think both, I think that's right. When it talks about passing on spiritual experience, Buddhism tends to talk about *kalyana mitrata* - spiritual friendship - and it tends to talk about dialogue.

So in a text like the *Kalama Sutta*, you get this test for how you know something's true. So, it's something that you know in your own experience is helpful, and it's something that's praised by the wise. Both of those conditions are there. And in something like the *Anapanasati Sutta*, you're listening to the Buddha talking about his experience of the meditation in the *sutta* and giving you hints about what's possible, about what to attend to. And then you sit down, and you take your attention there, and sure enough you're noticing in your own experience what's being described in the text. So, it's not guaranteed that, left to your own devices, you would naturally get there. It's definitely helpful having a description of something.

On the other hand, the Buddha just shows the way, and actually you have to, in your own experience, find out what those texts are pointing at, what the conditions are that support that experience. The Buddha is talking and we are listening, and that act of being a *sravaka*, a hearer, that act of receptivity, is as important as the articulation of it. So, you've got two people, two experiences, coming into connection and dialogue.

It's a good model, I think, for why the System of Practice is important. What it's trying to say is, "Look, this is what's possible, this is where your practice can go, and this is how you can do it." It's a map, isn't it, so you know where you're headed, so you know what the main landmarks are along the way, so you can keep yourself en route. You've got to do it, you've got to find what works in your own experience. But you don't have to do it alone. We can learn from the experience of people who have trod the path before us. ♦♦

Reflections on Friendship and a Deep Thank You from Concord

There is a saying in prison that goes, "I came in alone and I'm leaving alone." It's used mostly as a way to explain away why we don't want or need friendships - usually after someone has let us down. It's easy to buy into this individualistic "it's me against the world" attitude. If you look for the worst in people and situations, you're going to get exactly what you expect. This has proved itself true in my experience, time and time again. In the past, eventually everyone I met was viewed with an untrusting, fearful eye. I became frustrated and angry with life. Just like most everyone in here.

I knew I couldn't continue living in this way much longer. That's when Bodhana arrived at Concord. He brought the Dharma, as well as an open and joyful temper-

ament. Most importantly, he brought us metta. I listened to what he had to say. I practiced meditation and watched as the mud began to settle to the bottom of the glass. I learned about a way out of suffering. Life didn't have to be filled with pain. Peace was within reach.

Over the years, many from Aryaloka have come to Concord. They've shared their experience, their practices, and their hearts. On behalf of all of us, thank you! We are very fortunate to have such support. The general term is "volunteer," but we've decided that "friend" is a more accurate description.

After all, Sangharakshita, in *The Bodhisattva Ideal*, explains, "It is of the utmost importance for us to be in contact with people who are at least a little more

spiritually advanced than we are ourselves..." If you haven't visited Concord, think about it. The help you give to someone may not be evident right away, but it will eventually bear fruit.

I may have come in alone, carrying my burdens and isolating myself, but with the help of some true friends at Aryaloka I will be leaving with joy, peace, and happiness in my heart. Isn't that what we all want?

Elizabeth Kubler-Ross says:

You may view the eternal essence of your existence in terms of the impact your every mood and action has on those you touch, and then in turn, on those they touch, and on and on - even long after your life span is completed. You will never know the rippling effects of the smile and words of encouragement you give to other beings.

sangha notes

Continued from Page 18

We wish each and every one of these extraordinary individuals much *metta* and congratulations on their never-ending spiritual journeys! Each of you, in your

unique ways, enhances our Sangha on so many levels.

On behalf of the entire community, I thank you for your study efforts and the contributions you all bring to Aryaloka and beyond.

Our community is made up of an array

of vibrant, eclectic, energetic, loving, kind and generous people. Please continue your own personal journey with us, and encourage others that you might know to join us, in whatever way makes meaning for them!

Until next time...

~ Pam White

Upcoming Events

Continued from Page 20

- 19-25 MEDITATION MARATHON! Details TBA
- 20 Men's mitra class
- 21 Sangha Night, 6:45 - 9:15, open to all
- 22 Drop-in yoga, 5:30-6:30 p.m.
- 22 Aryaloka Council meeting, 6:30 p.m.
- 24 Drop-in gentle yoga, 4 p.m.
- 26 ALL SANGHA PICNIC! Details TBA
- 26 Poetry Group, 4-6 p.m.
- 27 Men's mitra class
- 28 Sangha Night, 6:45 - 9:15, open to all
- 29 Drop-in yoga, 5:30-6:30 p.m.
- 29 Drop-in meditation, 7-9 p.m.
- 31 Drop-in gentle yoga, 4 p.m.
- 31 Full-moon puja and meditation, 7-9 p.m.

SEPTEMBER

- 3 Men's mitra class
- 4 Sangha Night, 6:45 - 9:15, open to all
- 5 Drop-in yoga, 5:30-6:30 p.m.
- 5 Intro to Meditation and Buddhism, 7-9 p.m.
- 7 Drop-in gentle yoga, 4 p.m.
- 7-8 GFR Women's overnight
- 9 Men's practice day
- 10 Men's mitra class
- 11 Sangha Night, 6:45 - 9:15, open to all

- 12 Drop-in yoga, 5:30-6:30 p.m.
- 12 Intro to Meditation and Buddhism, 7-9 p.m.
- 14 Drop-in gentle yoga, 4 p.m.
- 14-15 Concord Sangha Retreat, contact Bodhana FMI
- 15 Living in the Realm of the Bodhisattvas, 9 a.m.-1 p.m., Viriyagita
- 16 Intermediate yoga, 8:30-9:45 a.m.
- 16 Heather Maloney concert, details TBA
- 17 Men's mitra class
- 18 Sangha Night, 6:45 - 9:15, open to all
- 19 Drop-in yoga, 5:30-6:30 p.m.
- 19 Intro to Meditation and Buddhism, 7-9 p.m.
- 21 Drop-in gentle yoga, 4 p.m.
- 21-23 A Mindfulness Practice - Yoga and Buddhism, Lily Sibley
- 23 *Introduction to Meditation (Loving-kindness), 9 a.m.-1 p.m.*
- 23 Poetry Group, 4-6 p.m.
- 24 Men's mitra class
- 25 Sangha Night, 6:45 - 9:15, open to all
- 26 Drop-in yoga, 5:30-6:30 p.m.
- 26 Aryaloka Council meeting at 6:30
- 26 Intro to Meditation and Buddhism, 7-9 p.m.
- 28 Drop-in gentle yoga, 4 p.m.
- 28 *Full-moon puja and meditation, 7-9 p.m.*
- 28-30 The Four Brahma Viharas retreat, Karunasara and Arjava
- 30 Writing Class, 1-5 p.m., Barbara Steiner

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

- 1-2 Noble Silence Retreat continues
2 Men's mitra class
3 Dharma Day, 7-9 p.m. (no Sangha Night)
COME CELEBRATE!
6 Full-moon puja and meditation, 7-9 p.m.
6 Drop-in gentle yoga, 4 p.m.
7 PUBLIC ORDINATION, 2 p.m.
7 *Men's practice day*
8 Order Day, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., with Nagabodhi
9 Men's mitra class –with Nagabodhi
10 Sangha Night, 6:45 – 9:15, open to all, guest Nagabodhi
11 Drop-in yoga, 5:30-6:30 p.m.
11 Council meeting, 6:30 p.m.
11 Drop-in meditation, 7-9 p.m.
12 Women's mitra class – Nagabodhi
13 Drop-in gentle yoga, 4 p.m.
14 Bodhicaryavatara study with Nagabodhi, 10 a.m.-3 p.m.
16 Men's mitra class
17 Sangha Night, 6:45 – 9:15, open to all
18 Drop-in yoga, 5:30-6:30 p.m.
18 Drop-in meditation, 7-9 p.m.
19 Women's mitra class
20 Drop-in gentle yoga, 4 p.m.
21 Intermediate yoga, 8:30-9:45 a.m.
22 Introduction to Meditation – Mindfulness, 9 a.m.-1 p.m.
23 Men's mitra class
24 Sangha Night, 6:45 – 9:15, open to all
25 Drop-in yoga, 5:30-6:30 p.m.
25 Drop-in meditation, 7-9 p.m.
26 *Women's mitra class*

- 26-29 Open Heart, Quiet Mind yoga and meditation retreat
29 Poetry group, 4-6 p.m.
30 Men's mitra class
31 Sangha Night, 6:45 – 9:15, open to all

AUGUST

- 1 Drop-in yoga, 5:30-6:30 p.m.
1 Drop-in meditation, 7-9 p.m.
2 Women's mitra class
2 *Full-moon puja and meditation, 7-9 p.m.*
*Note: this is a **Thursday** night*
3 Drop-in gentle yoga, 4 p.m.
3-5 RENTAL – entire facility closed
6 Men's mitra class
7 Sangha Night, 6:45 – 9:15, open to all
8 Drop-in yoga, 5:30-6:30 p.m.
8 Drop-in meditation, 7-9 p.m.
9 Women's mitra class
10 Drop-in gentle yoga, 4 p.m.
10-12 Walk Your Talk, Know Your Truth:
Living Authentically with Buddhist practice
– retreat for newcomers – Amala and Sheila
12 *Men's practice day*
13 Men's mitra class
14 Sangha Night, 6:45 – 9:15, open to all
15 Drop-in meditation, 7-9 p.m.
15 Drop-in yoga, 5:30-6:30 p.m.
16 Women's mitra class
17 Drop-in gentle yoga, 4 p.m.
18 Intermediate yoga, 8:30-9:45 a.m.
18 Eating a Vegetarian Diet Mindfully class,
10 a.m.-2 p.m., Megrette Fletcher

continued on page 19

ongoing events

Sangha Night At Aryaloka

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

- Led by Amala, Arjava, and other sangha members.
- 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 these 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