

# Three Jewels



QUARTERLY: FALL 2010  
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THE NEWSLETTER OF BLUE LOTUS BUDDHIST TEMPLE

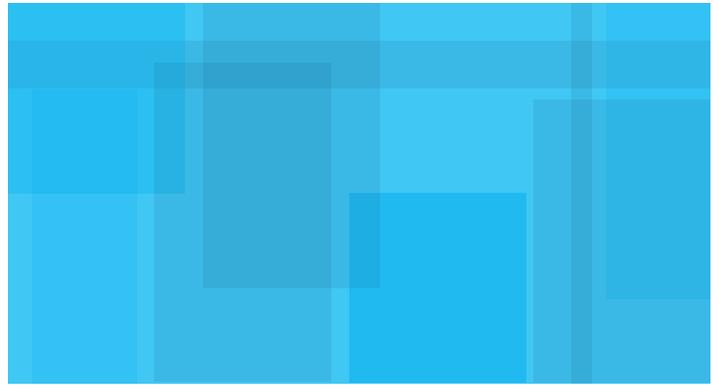
## Buddha Kids

EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN BEGINS AT BLUE LOTUS!

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# Three Jewels

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PUBLISHED BY BLUE LOTUS BUDDHIST TEMPLE

**CONTACT**

Address: 520 Devonshire Lane #8, Crystal Lake, IL, 60014 (USA)

Telephone: (815) 444-8915

Website: [www.bluelotustemple.org](http://www.bluelotustemple.org)

Email: [mail@bluelotustemple.org](mailto:mail@bluelotustemple.org)

**ABBOT**

Bhante Sujatha Peradeniye

**EDITOR**

John Stanley

[media@bluelotustemple.org](mailto:media@bluelotustemple.org)

**GRAPHIC DESIGNER**

Bibi Dowell

[chickadee@82birds.com](mailto:chickadee@82birds.com)

**ORDAINED SANGHA**

**CHICAGOLAND, IL & SOUTHERN WISCONSIN**

Bhante Sanyatha

Bhante Samita

Bhikkuni Vimala

**PEORIA, IL**

Bhante Rahula

**LAS VEGAS, NV**

Bhante Punna

**PRESIDENT**

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Brian Waspi, Kristin Hannah, Julie Gibson

# Three Jewels Newsletter, Evolved: A Letter from the New Editor & Designer

The Three Jewels newsletter is an extension of the Blue Lotus Buddhist Temple's efforts to create a broader sense of Sangha.

At a recent meeting that included several Blue Lotus members involved with our website and promotion, Bhante Sujatha asked me to take over as the editor of the *Three Jewels* newsletter. Inspired by personal articles written by Blue Lotus members and friends in past newsletters, I decided that I would like to make *Three Jewels* into what I have been informally calling a "mini-magazine" of news about the Temple, articles by BLT members, and artwork. Bibi Dowell, graphic designer at 82 Birds, offered to help in this process and create a brand-new template that would be easy to read and lend itself to printing as well. To say I am pleased with her new design is an understatement.

Besides the new design, the greater length, and the content, you may notice something missing: Upcoming Events. At our meeting, we decided to send event announcements via our email list as they come, rather than inundate you with upcoming events in our quarterly newsletter. Many have also noticed that you can view a list of all of our upcoming events on our Facebook page. More about the Facebook page is featured in this edition, but if you cannot wait, you can find the link on our website, [bluelotustemple.org](http://bluelotustemple.org).

Both Bibi and I hope that our efforts will bring you an enjoyable and informational experience. In our next issue, we will be soliciting new articles and *Letters to the Editor*. We'd love to hear what you think!

JOHN STANLEY

Editor & Writer

[media@bluelotustemple.org](mailto:media@bluelotustemple.org)

BIBI DOWELL

Graphic Designer

[chickadee@82birds.com](mailto:chickadee@82birds.com)

# Buddha Kids



## CONTACT INFO

Kristen Carpenter

Email: [spercle73@hotmail.com](mailto:spercle73@hotmail.com)

## WHEN

The first Saturday of each month at 10:00 AM.

## WHERE

Blue Lotus Temple Meditation at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Woodstock, IL (221 Dean Street) in the room adjacent to the Meditation room.

## REMINDER

This is not a drop-off program. Parent/Grandparent must be present at the Saturday Meditation and be ready for their child to join them for the Dharma Talk.

## education for children begins at blue lotus!

In this class, children will be introduced to Buddhism in various ways: through stories, meditation, and crafts. These variations allow children the freedom of movement, while being mindful of their bodies. We will also be doing a small Yoga session at the beginning of each class, just to help the kids settle into a quiet state.

In our first class, we introduced the concept of meditation by reading the book, *Peaceful Piggy Meditation*, by Kerry Lee Maclean. The author

touched on concepts such as proper posture and being mindful of your body. We also made “mind jars” with water and sand that the children got to take home to help them practice meditating at home.

On October 2<sup>nd</sup>, we read the story, *Zen Ghosts*, by Jon J. Muth. The author uses Halloween to address the concept of a koan, a question that you have to answer yourself. While the children pondered the question in the book, they colored mandalas in Halloween colors. Coloring itself can be considered a

type of mediation when done thoughtfully.

In our November 6<sup>th</sup> class, we will be reading *Little Stone Buddha*, by K.T. Hao. The author addresses the concept of giving through a Sho-Tao offering. Given that it is the Thanksgiving season, we will have a small “sharing” picnic in the classroom with our own sho-tao (red bean bun) and create mandalas from rainbow goldfish. We will then pour the goldfish into cups (letting go of our attachment to our artwork) and have fun munching on a snack before rejoining the

group for the Dharma Talk.

Each class lasts for 30 minutes. Children are then dismissed from the classroom to join the Dharma Talk led by the monks and nuns across the hall. This allows both the children and adults to enjoy meditation separately, but come back together for discussion and be part of the community.

This class will be limited to 6–8 children, so please let me know in advance if your child would like to attend. We are still accepting children into the program at this time.

# A Lotus on the Web

## OUR WEBSITE

[bluelotustemple.org](http://bluelotustemple.org)

Our official website is continually evolving with biographies of the people at Blue Lotus, a description of the many services we offer—including an updated calendar of events and service locations—media links to our Facebook, Twitter, Podcast, YouTube, and Photo pages, and our store featuring CDs, meditation supplies, and our new bookstore.

## FACEBOOK

[facebook.com/bluelotustemple](http://facebook.com/bluelotustemple)

In addition to our main website, [bluelotustemple.org](http://bluelotustemple.org), many of you are aware that we maintain an active Facebook page that not only keeps you up-to-date with the latest happenings, but contains photos, videos, discussion boards,

and an active community of users who interact with each other. As I write, we have over 600 “fans.” If you haven’t checked it out yet, now is the time. What’s more, you do not need to be a member of Facebook to access the page. Ignore the sign-in request at the top and browse away. When you are ready to start interacting, you can create an account on Facebook in minutes and begin making comments and submitting your own Wall posts, photos, and links.

## PODCAST

In addition to Facebook, we recently started our own Podcast. For those of you who don’t know, a podcast is a series of audio or video files that are updated regularly as *episodes*. Our podcast features Dharma Talks by our sangha, as well as audio from special events—you may

have even seen us recording at a recent meditation. If you have iTunes, you can subscribe to our podcast and it will automatically update with the newest content. If you have an iPod or iPhone, you can even listen on-the-go.

Anyone with a computer can listen to and download our podcast. Visit the media section of our website for the link. You will also find a link on our Facebook page. Or, go to the iTunes Store and search for “Blue Lotus Temple.” The title of the podcast is, fittingly, *Well, Happy, and Peaceful*.

We are also looking for volunteers who would be willing to record Dharma talks. I have recorded with my iPhone and my digital camera’s audio recording feature. If you have a device like this and can help, email me at [media@bluelotustemple.org](mailto:media@bluelotustemple.org).

## TWITTER

[twitter.com/bluelotustemple](http://twitter.com/bluelotustemple)

For those of you on Twitter, we offer short updates that mirror our announcements on Facebook. Just as on Facebook, you do not have to be a member of Twitter to read our page.

## YOUTUBE

[youtube.com/bluelotustemple](http://youtube.com/bluelotustemple)

Our newest presence is on YouTube. We’ll be offering videos of events as well as Dharma Talks from our Sangha. You can also subscribe to our channel to be updated when new videos are uploaded.

See you on the web!

—John Stanley

*We are also looking for volunteers who would be willing to record Dharma talks. I have recorded with my iPhone and my digital camera’s audio recording feature. If you have a device like this and can help, email me at [media@bluelotustemple.org](mailto:media@bluelotustemple.org).*

# Blue Lotus Buddhist Book Group



We are currently working on *What Buddhists Believe* by Ven. Dr. K Sri Dhammananda.

Enjoy casual and informal discussion held in a welcoming atmosphere by attending *The Blue Lotus Buddhist Book Group*, gathering at the Crystal Lake Borders on Rt. 14 next to World Market. We are currently working on *What Buddhists Believe* by Ven. Dr. K Sri Dhammananda.

It is not important that members join at the beginning—each week's discussion is unique and not based on the prior week, or on earlier readings. So, newcomers: stop in and check it out!

The group meets in the back of the store in the Literature section, where Borders saves a table for us at 7 p.m. on the first and last Thursday of every month.

The next dates are as follows: **October 28, 2010, November 4, 2010, December 2, 2010**

## CONTACT INFO

Please contact Courtenay Hill Wilson with comments, questions or concerns at 815.479.0377 or [chinacourt@sbcglobal.net](mailto:chinacourt@sbcglobal.net). Extra books can be brought to the group by request.

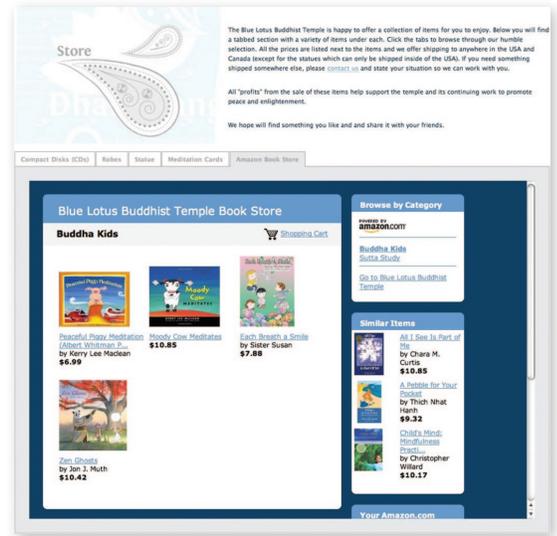
# News From Blue Lotus West In Geneva, IL



In August, Blue Lotus West moved to its new home at 321 Stevens Street in Geneva, IL. Prana Yoga Center, a longtime friend of BLW, relocated to the new facility, bringing the sangha with it. We are very grateful for the care and support Lisa Bertke and the PYC staff have shown us, and look forward to continued fellowship. Thank you to Chris Birks and Margaret Guseman for organizing this group.

## Blue Lotus Bookstore Opens

We are proud to offer an Amazon Associates bookstore in the Store section of our website. We currently offer the complimentary books for our *Buddha Kids* program and the monthly *Sutta Study*. We are adding new titles all the time, so check back in from time to time. When you buy your books from our store, a portion of the proceeds benefits the temple. Thank you to Norm Carpenter and Benjamin Dowell for setting this up!



## New Monthly Sutta Studies Begin

by Bhante Sanyatha

In the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C., India was filled with profound philosophers and pundits; Goutama Buddha was among them. While scientists tried to find the answers to life's problems materialistically, these pundits tried to find the answers for the same questions by looking inward.

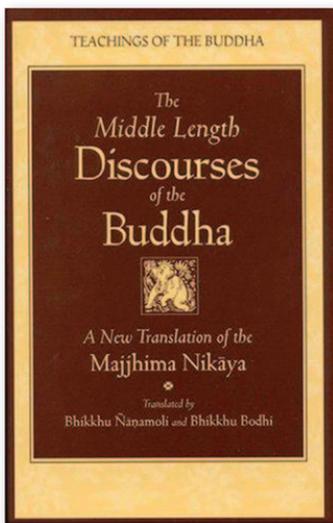
What Buddha found is universal and anybody can relate to it. It's scientific and realistic. Massive loads of teachings are available that he taught throughout his 45 years of service.

This sutta discussion is an effort to take a very keen observation into the Buddha's teachings in order to understand them thoroughly. We are going to start with the *Majjhima Nikaya* (Middle Length Discourses). It has 152 discourses, including Buddha's core teachings. We will be starting with the first volume of the series.

There are three books in this series. If you have the book, please make sure to bring it, but you do not have to buy the book. We will not provide copies of suttas, but we will send you a link each month where you can download the sutta and make copies.

We meet at the Monks' residence in Crystal Lake on the last Sunday of each month (subject to change: Please watch for emails announcing the reading, date, and time).

Book: *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha* You can now purchase this book in our new Amazon Store in the Store section of our website. A portion of the proceeds benefits the temple.



# 2010 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter Financials & Temple Update

**Total Revenue:** \$7,544.64

**Pledges and Donations:** \$5,155.64

**Financial Assets as of 10/1/2010:** \$33,711.27

**Land Loan Balance as of 10/1/2010:** \$50,380.95

**Land Loan Payment:** \$497.50 per month

## BLUE LOTUS TEMPLE UPDATE

In August 2009, Blue Lotus Buddhist Temple purchased a five-acre parcel of land—the site of our future temple. The property is located north of Woodstock, on the north side of Charles Road, ¼ mile east of Queen Anne Road. A lot has transpired since the purchase of the land and we would like to take this opportunity to give everyone an update as to where we are in our planning process.

Obtaining a special land-use permit for the property from the McHenry County Building Commission has been our primary activity. As part of this process, we have developed a site plan showing where the temple building, parking lot, driveway, and a water retention area will be located. We have also submitted a preliminary floor plan for a 4,650 square-foot building and commissioned a required traffic study to determine if Charles Road would have to be widened to include turning lanes at the temple entrance. We are happy to report we will not have to pay to have turning lanes installed.

Although we do not have exact costs for the entire project, we have received budgetary construction estimates from builders and prices for flooring and lighting. While awaiting approval from the county, we are now focusing our efforts on a capital fundraising campaign that will enable us to complete construction of a temple within the next two years.

On Sunday, October 24<sup>th</sup>, the Temple Board held an all-day strategic planning meeting in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, at which various fundraising initiatives were discussed. Several temple members attended a two-hour open forum portion of the meeting and presented a number of good fundraising ideas. The level of enthusiasm and participation was fantastic. Very shortly, we will be rolling out some of the key programs developed at the meeting. Good things are definitely going to happen! We will keep you posted about our progress in future issues of the newsletter.

“A jug fills drop by drop.”—Buddha

—*Blue Lotus Buddhist Temple Board*

**B**elieve nothing, no matter where you read it or who has said it, not even if I have said it, unless it agrees with your own reason and your own common sense.



**Life** is a very short experience of this existence. In this existence, we do have struggle, pain, grief, and so on that we all are going through. We do not have that much time left in life; it is very short. I think that it the beauty of this life.

If I ask, *How much time do we have?* the answer is that we don't really know. I think that no one can give a solid answer to that question.

According to the teachings of Buddha, the only time we have is *this time, or right now*. This is the time we know and this is the time we have.

Once Buddha said, "khano vo ma upacchaga," which means, "Do not lose your moment." Our moment is the only thing we have in our life and there is no guarantee about all of the other things we have. Sooner or later we will lose them.

We all have to understand, moment to moment, how wonderful it is to have this human life. Many people do not know the value of this life. Just imagine for a moment: if you focus your efforts, you can do many good things for yourself and others in this lifetime. However, when we look around the world, most human beings are absorbed in distractions.

Life is fragile; we have to handle it mindfully. Below are some guideline to achieve greater happiness in life:

The Greatest Achievement is Selflessness.

The Greatest Worth is Self-Mastery.

The Greatest Quality is Seeking to Serve Others.

The Greatest Precept is Continual Awareness.

The Greatest Medicine is The Emptiness of Everything.

The Greatest Action is Not Conforming to the World's Ways.

The Greatest Magic is Transmuting the Passions.

The Greatest Generosity is Non-Attachment.

The Greatest Goodness is A Peaceful Mind.

The Greatest Patience is Humility.

The Greatest Effort is Not Concerned with Results.

The Greatest Meditation is A Mind That Lets Go.

The Greatest Wisdom is Seeing Through Appearances.

Metta and karuna,  
—Bhante Sujatha

# Hello Fellow Breathe-ists

by Nile Tallman

**B**hante Sujatha caused me to do some serious reflection after our discussion of the label *Buddhist*. In the world of Facebook and Twitter with short bursts of ultra-concise information swapping, I wanted a label to stick to myself. I wanted everyone to know, like on old maps of uncharted territory regarding dragons, “Here lies a Buddhist”. But, why? I sometimes act very “un-Buddhist” (whatever that means). My understanding of the Dharma is admittedly not very deep. Am I tarnishing the label? Is it a matter of acting “un-Buddhist” and carrying around that label that is the problem? Could little old me give the teachings of the Buddha a bad name? I felt a burning shame at realizing I was using the word so casually. I wanted to explore the terms a bit more deeply.

In one sense, the suffix *-ist* denotes someone who practices or does something as in the words *pianist* or *artist*. In that sense a Buddhist is one who practices the teachings of the Buddha. I

like that idea. But, what is the difference between a pianist and someone who plays piano? How do we discern between one who makes art and an artist?

What is the difference between one who follows the Buddhist path and a Buddhist? Is it a matter of skill, intention, or context? I’m not sure.

In the other sense, the suffix *-ist* is related to *-ism*. It denotes an authoritative doctrine of some sort. Usually *-isms* are perceived as fanatical, obsessive, or half-crazed (sometimes fully-crazed). Some of the ones that immediately come to mind are: Fascism, Satanism, Nazism, nationalism, capitalism, and socialism. People kill and die over *-isms*. I do not tend to think of the Buddha’s teachings in that way.

But, I do not want to get too much into a post-modern deconstruction of suffixes and meaning of words. That becomes an ugly ever-turning trap in and of itself.

In the sea of dogmatic beliefs and world-views, I wanted people to know

that the teachings of the Buddha were alive, well, and available to those who were interested. I didn’t realize that what I was trying to do in using the label of Buddhist. And that is the problem: I didn’t realize. I wasn’t being mindful. There are probably much better ways to alert people to The Dharma’s availability than inserting Buddhist under religious views on my Facebook profile. With all the *-ists* and *-isms* floating around, muddled confusion by those seeing my declaration of Buddhist-ness surely would ensue. Focusing on my own practice and changing my own delusional thought patterns and behaviors would be much more helpful to myself and everyone else.

After much thought and flip-flopping, I come to the conclusion, as I often do: Moderation and thoughtfulness is the key. The middle way. Labels in general are a shorthand for describing a set of beliefs and/or behaviors but also can be constraining and limiting.

*What is the difference between one who follows the Buddhist path and a Buddhist? Is it a matter of skill, intention, or context? I'm not sure.*

And one can become attached to the idea of not labeling as much as being attached to a specific label such as Buddhist. If it fits and is helpful to the world at large, I will use the label. If it is unhelpful and damaging, I will not. I will err on the side of not using the term "Buddhist" to describe myself. How will I know the difference? I will try my best to figure that out as I go. And as I stumble along, I'm sure the wonderful Sangha from Blue Lotus Temple will be there to help me. All I need do is ask, I'm sure. I also want to be more conscious of all the other labels and categories I impose on myself and others.

I am often amazed and humbled by the many layers of ignorant thought patterns to which I desperately cling. I struggle to assert my existence, to make damn sure I belong, I

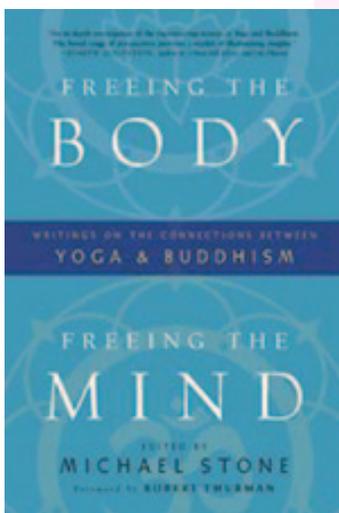
matter, and am noticed. I go through all sorts of mental aerobatics and cognitive trickery to carve out this thing called self. Despite a limited understanding of its illusory nature, I still want to be me at the expense of much deeper truths. Underneath all of this mental flaying about is a glimpse of something calm, something beyond my childish ego. Buddha Nature sits within me just watching the pointless furious activity without judgment. I know it is there. As my understanding and practice improves, I suspect I will see more of it. But, I can't explain it, can't hold onto it, and moment by moment, as I am constantly swept away by Samsara, I forget even that glimpse. Again. And again. And again.

As we all intimately know, mindfulness can be very slippery. ❀

# A Marriage of Buddhism and Yoga

by Linda Karl

## Book Review



Linda Karl reviews Michael Stone's new book, *Freeing the Body, Freeing the Mind: Connecting Yoga & Buddhism*

“Those deep into Buddhism can find a lot to help their understanding and meditation practice in the wisdom and embodying practicality of the Yoga tradition. Those deep into Yoga can find enriching dimensions in the Buddhist Yogas presented herein. And the broad range of readers can find practical help, methods, and tools for a better health, life, and state of mind in the integrated paths presented.”

This book is an absolute must for anyone who wants to explore and better understand the “inter-being” of Buddhism and Yoga. For me, it is a joy. I believe it will become one of the “go to” books for a combined study of these two subjects. If I had my own yoga teacher training it would definitely be on my required reading list.

Buddha studied with diverse yoga masters on his journey towards nirvana. Buddha was a yogi so the Western interpretations of Yoga and Buddhism as being two separate paths never felt right to me in my bones. Just like the

first Mindfulness Yoga and Meditation Training at Spirit Rock spoke to my entirety as a Buddhist yogini, so does Stone’s book further confirm what I have intuited all along.

In his Introduction Stone speaks to how the oversimplification and misrepresentations of the two traditions disregarded how Yoga and Buddhism share the same ethical and philosophical components. Stone refers to Yoga and Buddhism as being like the ecology of trees—while trees share the same characteristics and similarities, a maple and oak are different. The branches and leaves are different, they have different nutritional requirements, and they look very different from one another. But upon closer inspection, the similarities are clear—root systems grow in similar ways, growth cycles follow the seasons in similar ways. So whether comparing trees or two wisdom traditions, Stone says that “when we look for parallel comparisons, we find difference, and when we look for difference, we find

similarity.”

But you don’t have to take Michael Stone’s word for it because various Buddhist and Yoga master teachers contribute the first 12 chapters of the book. Among others, Chip Hartranft and Frank Jude Boccio explore the way their own Buddhist and yoga practices interweave, setting their practices against the backdrop of traditional teachings. Daniel Odier and Eido Shimano Roshi explore the body from the Zen and Ch’an perspectives and in so doing break down the false view that meditation is a mind practice separate from the body. Victoria Austin writes from her perspective as both a Zen teacher and Iyengar Yoga teacher. Christopher Chapple, whom Stone refers to as “one of the most prominent Yoga scholars in the United States” and a practitioner, draws parallels between traditional Yoga and Buddhist teaching. New York yoga teacher Jill Satterfield tells her story about how she integrated Yoga and Buddhism not just in her teaching but also in a dramatic transformation in her own body and

heart—and it definitely is a dramatic story of self-healing because I heard her tell the same story at Spirit Rock. Finally, Sarah Powers speaks to her melding of Yoga and yin practices and Buddhist training and what it's like to practice Yoga and Buddhadharma day in and day out.

Stone's chapter is the last chapter entitled, "Practice Maps of the Great Yogis", where he writes of the wisdom of both the body and the mind as the ancients saw it in both traditions. In my experience I have found that some think that reading the ancient texts is a sufficient yoga practice (mind-stuff); others feel that asana is enough and never delve deeper into meditation and philosophy (body-stuff.) Too much of one and not enough of the other is a recipe for imbalance. An emphasis of one over the other further serves to separate the body-mind complex.

Buddha sat down to watch his own breath and knew that no insight was possible until his mind was settled and his body at ease. Patanjali wrote how asana and pranayama help with the release of effort, both physically and mentally. In the section entitled "Right Mind, Right Body" of this last chapter, Stone quotes Takuan who "reminds us of the immovable wisdom we find here in the body and awareness that is free from fixation and ambition." Takuan said: "The Right Mind is the mind that does not remain in one place. It is the mind that stretches throughout the entire body and self. The Confused Mind is the mind that, thinking something over, congeals in one place." Stone then quotes the last line of the Hatha Yoga Pradipika:

As long as the Prana does not enter and flow through the middle channel of one's mind and body, and the internal energy does not become stable by the control of the movements of prana; as long as the mind does not rest in the ease of the inherent resolution of opposites without any effort, so long all the talk of knowledge and wisdom is nothing but the nonsensical babbling of a madman.

Stone points out that the HYP ends with a "description of awakening as a mind at ease and a body dynamic and intelligent." So how do we use the body to study the mind and work with the mind through the body? Obviously asana alone has physiological benefits, but we need to remember that asana teaches us to work with the mind.

"In this very one-fathom long body along with perceptions and thoughts, do I proclaim the world, the origin of the world, the end of the world and the path leading to the end of the world," Buddha said. That is, the end of suffering, nirvana.

All the contributors mentioned above are practitioners first writing from their personal experiences of practicing both systems for years. Stone says that looking at traditions like Yoga and Buddhism as mere philosophies without practice is not good science, good research, or good history. He believes that a pure intellectual approach leaves core teachings unexamined and in such cases "the scholar is blinded by his or her books."

Finally, there is an ample Notes section at the end of the book citing references for each chapter from the important ancient texts to the modern Buddhist and Yoga classics—too many to list here but yoga and Buddhism scholars will not be disappointed in the breadth and scope of these references.

Stone's book, in his words, "attempts to describe not only the philosophical basis of Yoga and Buddhism but also what it's like to practice within and between these systems."

#### FURTHER READING

To read an excerpt from the book, visit [lindasyoga.blogspot.com/2010/08/yoga-and-buddhism.html](http://lindasyoga.blogspot.com/2010/08/yoga-and-buddhism.html)  
Linda's Blog: [lindasyoga.blogspot.com](http://lindasyoga.blogspot.com)  
Linda's Website, Metta Yoga: [lindakarl.net](http://lindakarl.net)

# Being Mindful of Our Health

by Marylou Nunamaker of Karma Yoga + Studio, Fox River Grove, IL

**M**y sister Sally is both a Registered Nurse with a Masters Degree in Public Health and a Healing Touch Professional. She will be attending a conference/seminar this weekend to learn the modality of Hologram Therapy. This is used for trauma, torture, abuse, and other very painful situations, resulting in remarkable healing.

I had to reflect on all the modalities that are available for us to live healthy and productive lives. With the choices seemingly endless, i.e., Acupuncture, Healing Touch, Therapeutic Yoga, Vibrational Healing, Physical Therapy, Massage Therapy, Herbal Therapy, Aromatherapy, the Science of Breath, Psychotherapy, Clinical therapy, etc., I wonder why more of us are not in the best of health. There must be a therapy for every personality type, and of course there are the medical and mental professions, exercise in general, and prayer.

Talking about all these healing arts made me question why so many of us are sick! It's almost not logical that anyone is sick.

In our conversation it became aware to me that most of us are born healthy; statistics tell us that. So, during our lifetime do we tend to not understand or value our good health?

Those who are born with health issues, again statistically this is a very small percentage of births, live their lives to the best of their abilities, struggling, working hard not to be limited by their limitations! (Federal laws insure all the opportunity to work regardless of physical limitations, etc.)

And unfortunately, there are accidents.

So while you may have had similar thoughts, perhaps today is the day all of us will be more mindful of our health.

Perhaps today we will be aware of our breathing, which is healing, energizing and restful. Remember the skills you have learned to make it healing and restorative throughout the day.

Try to remember to meditate at least one minute every day, no thoughts at all.

Wishing you peace, stillness, calm, and good health. ♡

# Something Was Missing

by Dan Krucek

**S**omething was missing in my life and I could not figure it out. I had a beautiful wife, a great job, a nice house, and a wonderful family. If I had all these wonderful things in my life, how could I feel something was missing?

There was something missing inside of me and it was not related to my faith because I felt I had a pretty good relationship with God and I had a strong belief in my faith.

I remembered I had taken a class on spirituality in college and that I found it very interesting; I was amazed that spirituality was not really related to a particular religion but more or less related to how people felt about their inside spirit, the person they talk to inside their head.

After I realized that maybe what I needed was to be more connected with myself spiritually, I went online to do some research about meditation and learned a lot more about how Buddhist monks use meditation. I then searched for a temple in the area and found Blue Lotus Temple and met Bhante Sujatha. Bhante introduced me to meditation, and a year later, I have a whole new part of my life that I can't believe I lived without. Meditation has taught me a lot more about myself, helped me with a lot of stress, and introduced me to a bunch of really wonderful people. Since I started meditation I have become a better person, a better husband, and I feel I have a much closer relationship with myself, which I think is very important. ♡

# Just Meditate

By Pam Larson (*Bhagya-Wholesome*)

In March of 2008 I received a terrifying phone call from my brother, Charlie. Our brother, Paul, had been diagnosed with stage 4 colon cancer. We were devastated. Paul began treatment with radiation, surgery, and then chemo. By this time, Paul had been with a wonderful woman, Gina, for 12 years. She put everything she had into taking care of Paul. After a year of treatments and Paul was still going strong, we almost relaxed. Then the unthinkable happened. Gina had been feeling ill but ignored it. She didn't want to take time off work that she may need to address Paul's needs. She went to her doctor and was diagnosed with uterine cancer. She was admitted to the hospital for a complete hysterectomy. When the surgeons completed the procedure and came out to talk to the family, it was shocking. They had never seen anything like it. The cancer was spreading so rapidly that it was consuming all of her organs. Gina lived 3 more weeks. She was 41 years old.

Two weeks after Gina's death, Paul came to

Charlie and told him that his treatments had been discontinued because the cancer was no longer responding. He went from the doctor's office to the funeral home and took care of all his arrangements in advance. He weakened over the next six months. During the summer of 2009 I realized that I needed something to help me endure these tragedies. I was not a religious person and I just felt very lost and desperate.

I made a trip to the local Borders and was actually looking for books on death and dying. I found a book called *Grieving Mindfully: A Compassionate and Spiritual Guide to coping with loss* by Sameet M. Kumar, Ph.D. As I was checking out, the cashier asked me if I knew about the book discussion group that was led by a monk there at Borders. I was excited to hear about it and asked her for more information. She gave me the name of the Blue Lotus Temple. I looked it up online and emailed Bhante Sujatha. I had started reading the book and was astounded at how it helped me to be calm and look at things that

were happening in my life in a completely different way. And when I visited with Bhante Sujatha, he told me to just meditate—a few minutes a day, whatever I could manage. I wasn't so sure about this advice, but I did it. I put my best effort into it. I read more books, I meditated, and somehow I kept going.

On March 5, 2010, I flew to Mississippi to see Paul. I had heard that he was deteriorating rapidly. He was still active, but struggling more to stay that way. He lived alone and had started hospice care back in December 2009. As soon as I walked in the house and looked at him, I knew this was the end. I hadn't seen him since December, so the changes were quite evident. I truly believe that my meditation practice and learning about the Buddha's teachings changed my frame of mind and allowed me to set aside the grief and sorrow that I felt about losing my brother. It became about him. This was his time and I was there to help him through it.

Paul was a very strong-minded Christian. It did not develop all of a sudden when he found out he was

dying; it was cultivated over a few years. When he was in the hospital for two weeks after his initial surgery, I read his Bible to him every night. When I stayed with him at the end, I took him to church every Sunday. I genuinely respected the peace and acceptance he gained from his strong faith.

Paul died on April 5, 2010. He was 43 years old. I cradled him in my arms just as I did when my mom brought him home when I was nine years old. I said goodbye, I told him to be happy, I told him that I would always love him. Everyone says he is in heaven with Gina. I can't say whether or not that is true, I just hope he is someplace good and peaceful. He deserves it.

Now that I am home and getting more involved with the temple, I am so happy that I took my time to really think about what I needed in my life. I have made the right decision. I can't quote the Buddha on any of this or provide any great wisdom. All I can say is "just meditate" is the best advice I've ever been given.

Be well, happy and peaceful!



# Reflections from My Spiritual Journey to Sri Lanka

by *Diana Schuster*

I had the honor to travel to this glorious Buddhist country this past June with a Sri Lankan monk, an American monk (Bhikkhuni Vimala) receiving her ordination in Sri Lanka, and another lay person.

Shortly after our two days of traveling from America, we hit the road to sample the island, starting in a major city, working our way up the mountains, then down the coast back up to our original starting point. We climbed into a van and drove, very slowly, on bumpy roads, for hours and hours and hours each day. Almost immediately, I became car sick from the super tight mountain twists and turns and rocky roads.

I kept asking, “Are we there yet?”, wanting this uncomfortable experience to be over. I soon realized I was unable to speak, eat, and when I got upset, it got worse. The pain was extreme at times but there was no turning back.

When I surrendered and relaxed, the magic happened: I was soaking in the beauty of this gentle land, finding comfort in seeing Buddha statues and temples along the roadside.



Little Monks we Met Along the Way

We passed farmers selling their produce, who would wave and break into huge smiles when they saw us. I watched people work contentedly in the rice and tea fields. Dogs slept on the warm pavement. I witnessed from the front seat, these proud and beautiful people celebrate the death of one of their own in a public funeral procession. Wearing all white, they carried the casket along the side of the ride, chanting, and placing a white fabric on the ground as the pallbearers proceeded to the cemetery. They were sending their loved one off with love and joy.

I watched in amazement

as cars, vans, buses, two-wheelers, motorcycles carrying a family of four, bicycles, dogs, and cows coexisted on two-lane roads. It was a dance. No stop lights, horns used as courtesy, and all moved in harmony. Rarely stopping as oncoming vehicles got closer, a space would open, and we would continue on our journey. There was no fear in me. The vibration was one of peace and teamwork. The more I witnessed this, the more I began to enjoy participating in this “sport” of driving.

When we came to our destination at the end of the first day, I expected to

see something spectacular—over the top amazing. That’s when I realized, it’s the journey, not the destination. All those hours of observing beauty, serenity, lushness, calmness, welcoming people, a variety of wildlife, and vistas and landscape I’d never seen, I realized that I’d been in spectacular the entire day! We were now at our resting point. Each morning of our five-day excursion, I was hopeful that that day’s drive would be different for me. Unfortunately, the challenge continued for the duration of the trip. I would settle into the front seat, recline it, and soak in

more beauty. Although uncomfortable, I enjoyed my silent journey. The scenery changed from mountains and waterfalls to the vastness of the ocean. We sent love to the area that had been the scene of the Tsunami. An image I hold dear was of a young water buffalo settling in to a mud pit bath on a sweltering day. He used his big floppy ears to throw water onto his back to cool himself off. "Make the best of the situation", I felt him say to me. I stopped asking, "Are we there yet?"



Sri Lankan Girls in a Parade



Sari Shopping in Sri Lanka

# On Attention

by Jim Kail

I'm sitting on my cushion and my attention keeps slipping off of my breath. Why is this so freakin' hard?! I've been at this for seven years and I still can't do it right! I suck at this!! Calm down I tell myself...On second thought, why would my brain find my breath interesting? After all, I breathe all the time without any attention placed on it—my brain runs it automatically. I know my brain also automatically places my attention on things without my even being aware of it. It seems to have its own default mode.

For example, last year we ran out of candy on Halloween. OH NO!! My brain all by itself put my attention on my imagination. Now the devils will TP my house! What do we tell the younger, little tykes dressed in their oh-so-cute costumes? With their parents, MY NEIGHBORS, right behind them!

At this time, I left the default mode and shifted my attention to my breath—a mindful mode. The stress decreased. Then we sat in the dark and pretended no one was home.

I think our states of mind and how we feel our whole lives moment by moment depend on where our attentions are—whether on objects, images, sensations, thoughts, the future, or the past. Just by putting my attention on smiling, I can slightly evoke the feeling of happiness.

These days I'm less concerned about how long I can keep my attention on my breath. I'm more concerned about practicing where my attention is at all times—the awareness of my attention. A good way to practice this is to keep putting my attention back on my breath when it slips off during meditation. We can't control our minds but we can influence them by directing our attentions. The skilled ability to observe where the attention is and to voluntarily redirect it is a powerful tool to liberate oneself from the suffering/pleasure cycle. In its default mode, the unmindful brain puts the attention on things that cause stress, worry, wrong actions, and wrong speech. Just redirecting the attention to the idea of compassion can solve many issues. I think this may be why Siddhartha put so much attention on focused attention. ❁

# Thanks for Bhante Sujatha

by Micheal Fronczak

Thank you for being my friend.  
Thank you for your example.  
Thank you for developing the minds of strangers.  
Thank you for loving yourself.  
Thank you for my name "Sanatha".  
Thank you for being my teacher.  
Thank you for showing me the world.  
Thank you for demonstrating courage.  
Thank you for loving the earth.  
Thank you for lighting the candle everyday.  
Thank for keeping yourself humble.  
Thank you for taking care of your family.  
Thank you for laughing with me.  
Whenever I think of you I smile.



# My Story

by Sucara

Since I was a child I've struggled with self-acceptance and feeling different or separate from others. This delusion of loneliness and isolation led me to finding ways to escape very early on in life. Soon enough I found what I thought I was looking for in drugs and other self-destructive activities.

At the end of the road I was homeless, jobless, penniless, addicted, and devoid of all hope. I tried taking my own life with the drugs. I told myself if it didn't work I would check in to treatment again. Thankfully the drugs didn't work and I ended up going into treatment. I'd tried many times before to turn my life around, but fear of dogma and religion kept me spiritually bankrupt. I always felt I was unworthy of a good life. I repeatedly went back to those self-destructive behaviors, but something was different this time. I was finally ready to change.

My family let me move back in with them and gave me another chance to get it together. I had managed to stay clean for a few months through a twelve-step program. I had been interested in Buddhism for a long time and was reading books and doing simple meditation practice on my own when I came across the Blue Lotus Temple. Many of the books I was reading talked about the importance of the Three Refuges in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, so I thought I might as well check it out. I used the contact form on the website to get information about the meditation groups. This was my first contact with Bhante Sujatha.

Bhante Sujatha suggested that I meet with him for a one-on-one session before I started attending meditation groups. When I met him I immediately felt comfortable with him; he seemed to emanate love and compassion.

It didn't matter to him that I didn't have a job at that time and was unable to make a donation. He genuinely seemed to care and wanted to help me. He listened to my story and told me he thought meditation would work for me, and he was right. He let me help by making fliers for his Dharma talks and other Blue Lotus events. My outlook on life and general well being was drastically changing for the better the more I practiced. For the first time in a long time I felt a part of something. I was well, happy, and peaceful. After a little while, Bhante Sujatha told me he thought I'd be a good candidate to take the Five Precepts, so I did. After taking the Five Precepts I felt I could really call myself a Buddhist and it motivated me to continue my practice and continue to be part of the Sangha.

I was 26 years old when I found Blue Lotus. I am now 27 and I am so blessed and so grateful. My life is constantly changing for the better. My relationships with my family members are better than ever. I am still an active member of a twelve-step program and I help others like me. Soon I will celebrate one full year without a drink or a drug! This may not seem like a big deal to some but for me it is a huge accomplishment.

I am currently working part-time and I have been accepted to go back to art school. I start in early October and if all goes well I should have a Bachelor's Degree in two years. Things are really looking up!

Without spiritual practice, real friends like Bhante Sujatha, and Blue Lotus Temple, I don't know if I'd have made it to this point. I am not perfect today. I am not the Buddha. I still need Blue Lotus. That is why it's called practice. This is only the beginning of my journey. Thank you Blue Lotus! 🌸

Pushing the wheelbarrow  
is easy, it's the thinking  
about it that is hard.

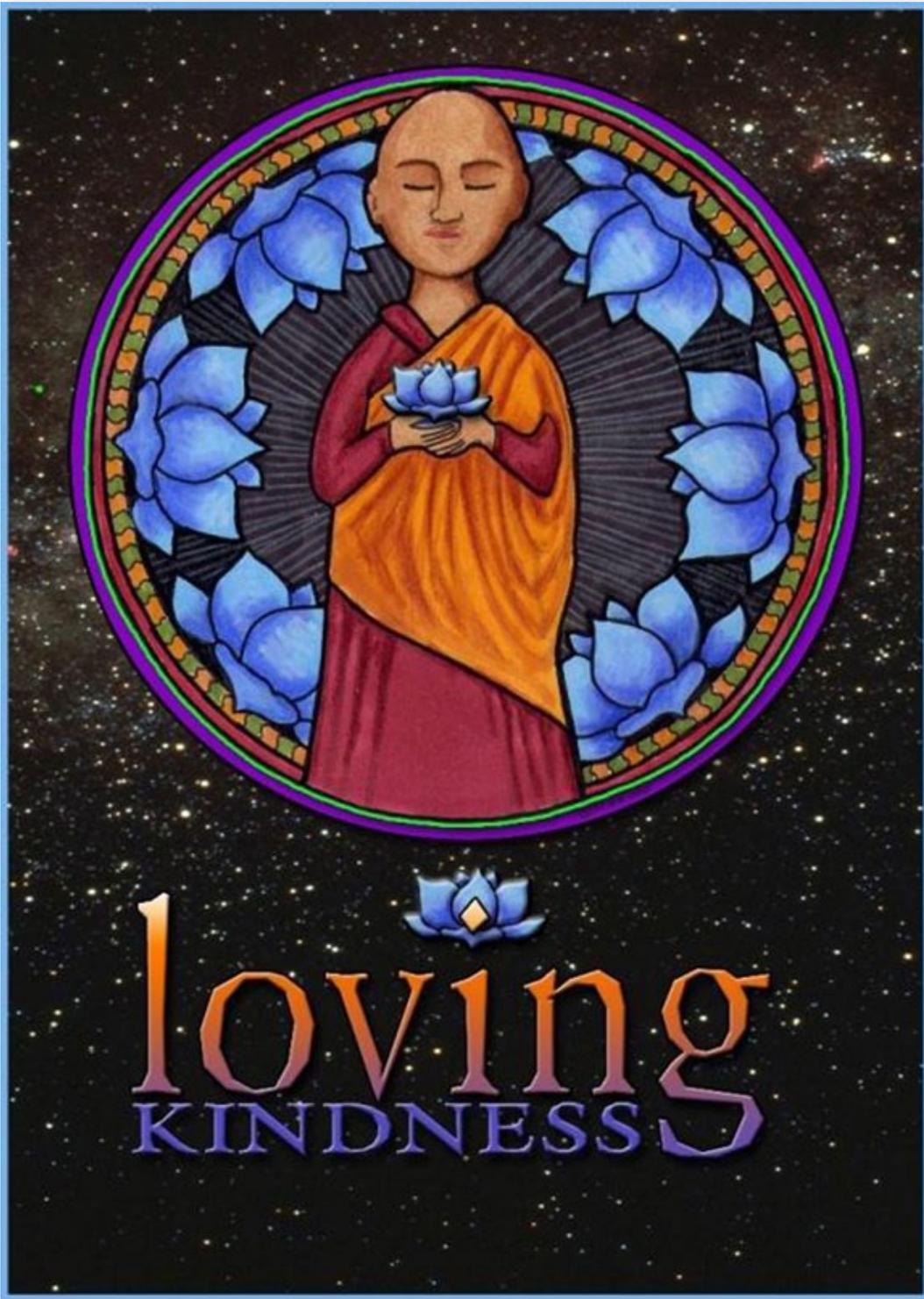


TIBETAN THANGKA IN THE MENRI STYLE: BUDDHA UNDER PEACH BOUGHS, (DETAIL).

Artist: Tod Nielsen

Medium: Gouache, watercolor, and gold on canvas.

This is an early work of mine. It is based on a similar thangka in the Rubin Museum. My painting teacher is Ang Tsherin Sherpa. The forms and attributes are strictly defined in the Menri style, but there is considerable freedom in composing the background landscape.



2010 LOVINGKINDNESS  
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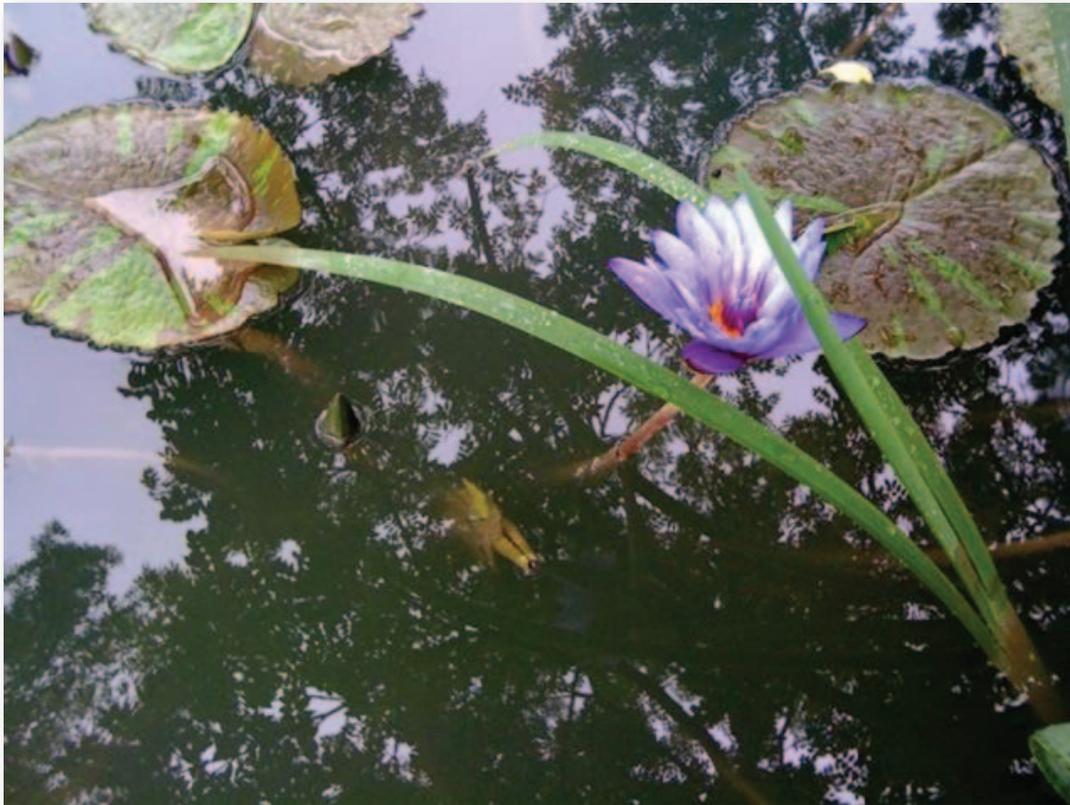
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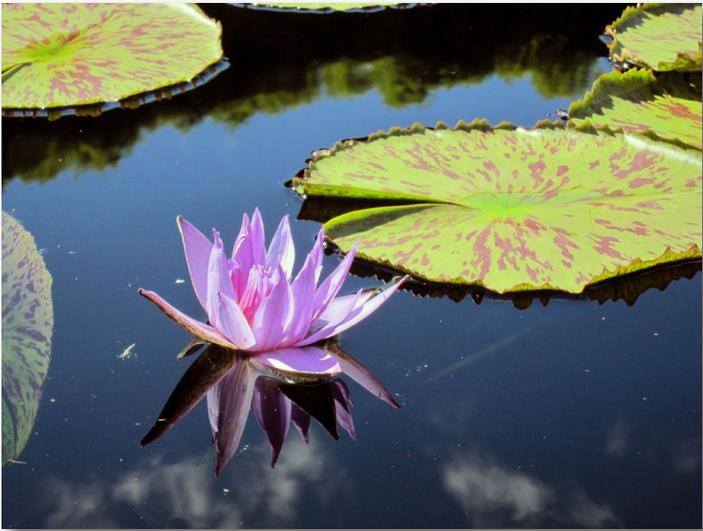
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ANNIVERSARY LOTUSES  
Photographer: Benjamin Dowell

These photos were taken on September 26, 2010 at the Chicago Botanic Garden. Prints are unframed and available at 11" x 8.5" or smaller. Each print is \$12, and 100% of the proceeds will go to benefit the Blue Lotus Temple building fund. Please contact the temple if interested.

When we fall short of a precept or a goal, remember that the Buddha Dharma is for those who want to be enlightened, not for those who already are.

(adapted by John Stanley from *The Church is for sinners, not saints*)