

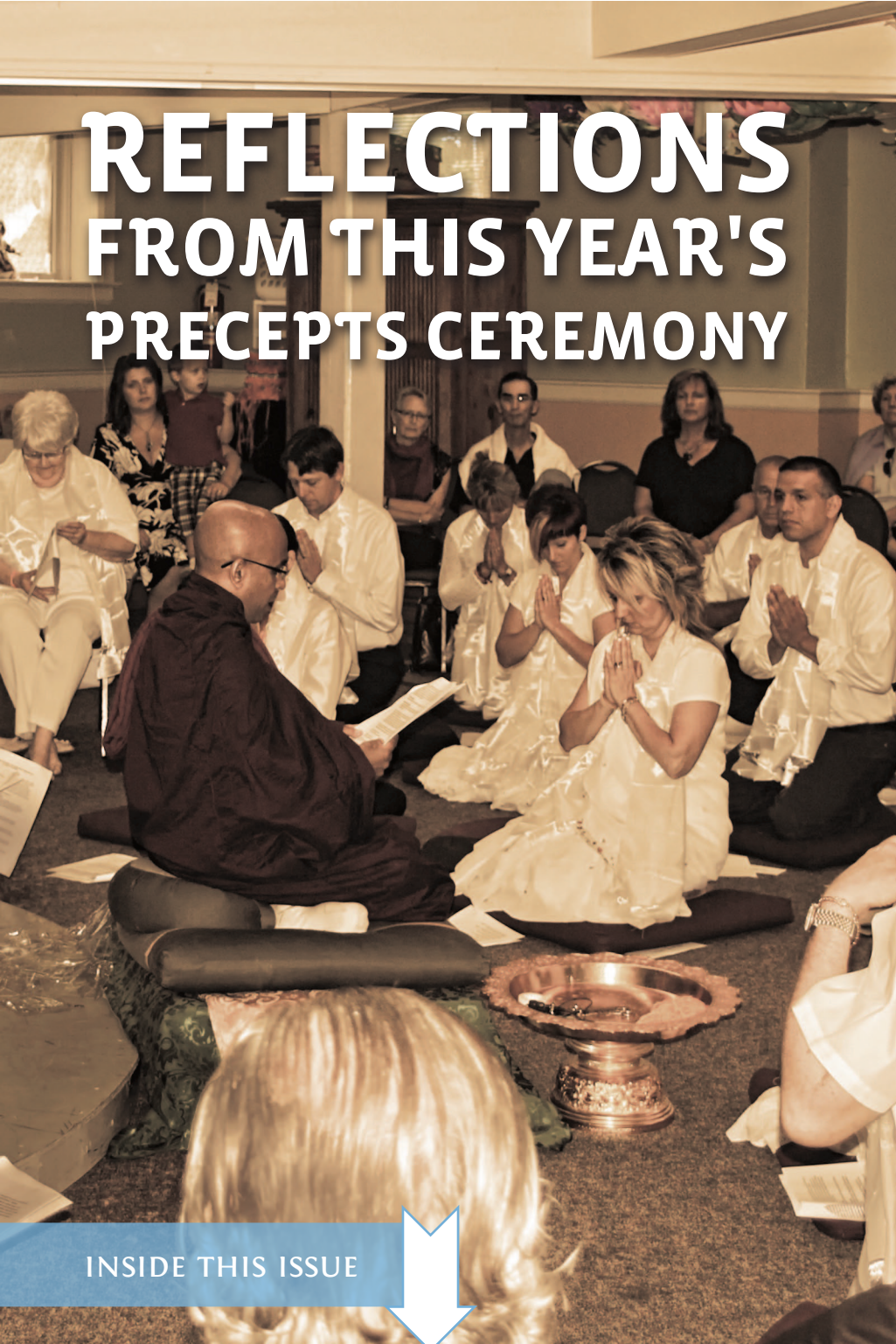
Three Jewels



QUARTERLY: OCT-DEC 2011
WWW.BLUELOTUSTEMPLE.ORG

THE NEWSLETTER OF BLUE LOTUS BUDDHIST TEMPLE

REFLECTIONS FROM THIS YEAR'S PRECEPTS CEREMONY



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Three Jewels

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SEND US YOUR THOUGHTS, ANNOUNCEMENTS, ARTICLES & ART!
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For faithful readers of *Three Jewels*, you know that John Stanley is no longer writing this column as editor of the publication. As he announced in the Summer issue, he has stepped out of the editor role after serving for over a year. I have stepped (or stumbled) into his footprints, working with graphic designer Bibi Dowell, who magically transforms all of your articles and photos into a visual work of art.

Bibi and John were a great duet, and worked tirelessly behind the scene to create *Three Jewels* as we have seen it over the last year. In my new role, they have both been sources of encouragement, patience, and support. Thank you, John, from all of us in Blue Lotus, for your generosity of time and talent. And thank you, from me, for offering such genuine support as I began the process of editing this newsletter. You have been there for every question I've sent your way, and I never read a snicker between the lines in your patient and helpful responses!

As I've worked on this issue, I have envisioned the newsletter as a family scrapbook of sorts. It holds records of events and lessons learned during this time period that begins with the annual Precepts Ceremony in May and ends with the Sri Lankan Dinner and Cooking Class held at the end of October. Like a scrapbook, not everything is included, but what is here will spark your own memories. The teachings presented remind us of our larger purpose as noble friends, which is to support each other as we travel this very individualized path.

And speaking of individualized paths, you will find your invitation to the novice ordination of Victor Absil in this issue. This

special event is set for December 3, the same day as our Blessing Ceremony for 2012. The memories from that special day will be in our next scrapbook, the Spring issue of *Three Jewels*. It is a rare and happy occasion to be present at an ordination ceremony, so I hope you will join Victor and the rest of the Blue Lotus family on that day, and then share in the chanting and community celebration we enjoy with the Blessing Ceremony.

As many of you know, Blue Lotus Temple has bought the Unitarian Universalist Church in Woodstock, where we have been meeting for over nine years. As we go to publication, final details about the date we "officially" take ownership are being worked out, but we can now say it is **our new home**. This is an exciting time for our entire sangha, as this longtime vision becomes our reality.

With Bhante Sujatha as our abbot and fearless leader, we know it will be a busy time as well. Hold on to your hats as we move into the new year. There will be building projects to work on, new classes to attend, new opportunities to become involved and to share your ideas and skills. There will be new challenges as well, as we become property owners with decisions to be made about how we will use our new temple and how we will make our visions come alive.

So enjoy the brief hiatus before the work begins, and keep seeing the Buddha's teachings in all your daily activities. Life is rich with possibilities for our spiritual growth if we stay awake in the present moment. ❀

Metta,
—*Bhikkhuni Vimala*

Have a reaction to something you read in this issue? Have a question, comment, or concern? Send your letters to vimalajf@gmail.com to be printed in the next issue.

PLEASE NOTE When submitting pictures, be sure to send the biggest versions you have. Images off the internet will print fuzzy. Look at the file size on your computer. If the picture file is under 1MB in size it probably isn't suitable for the newsletter!

Karuna in our community

COMPASSION IS THAT WHICH MAKES THE HEART OF THE GOOD MOVE AT THE PAIN OF OTHERS. IT CRUSHES AND DESTROYS THE PAIN OF OTHERS; THUS, IT IS CALLED COMPASSION. IT IS CALLED COMPASSION BECAUSE IT SHELTERS AND EMBRACES THE DISTRESSED.

—THE BUDDHA

Hello, fellow Blue Lotus Temple sangha and friends. I volunteer for McHenry County VOICE Sexual Assault services here in Woodstock one block from the temple. We are one of 33 centers funded partially by the state of Illinois.



As a volunteer I go to the McHenry County hospitals when a victim is brought to the Emergency Department. We let the victims know they are not alone and we can provide step by step help through their trauma.

Often, we are present when the evidence kit (rape kit) is performed and the victim's clothing is confiscated by the police. We provide new, tagged clothing to victims so they can leave the hospital with dignity.

I am seeking donations to help purchase clothing for the victims. Along with many other state agencies, our funding has been drastically cut this year. *Any amount you give is used only for the purchase of these clothes items.* If you would like to donate clothing, see the list below for what we need.

There will be a basket or envelopes for donations at Blue Lotus meditation services. If you would like to donate online please go to: <https://www.pioneercenter.org/voice/makeadonation/makeadonation.asp>. ❁

What we need: NEW

- sweat pants, yoga pants, size Large - black, navy, grey
- short sleeved shirts, size Large/X-Large -solid, plain colors
- sports bras, size Large
- underwear, size 7,8 or 9
- socks, white or black

—Candy Cotsiomitis

For more information on the services that VOICE offers, please visit <http://www.pioneercenter.org/newVoice/default.asp>
VOICE is a 501(c)3, non-profit charitable organization.

New Arrival at Blue Lotus

TED WALLACE WRIGHT was born on September 21, 2011 at 4:01 PM. His starting weight was 7 lbs. 14 oz. and he was 20 inches long. Here he is with Dad, Blue Lotus member Michael Wright, and big brother, Michael. Mom is Jan Wright.



Email your announcement (births, weddings, anniversaries, passings) to vimalajf@gmail.com to be included in our next newsletter.

2011 3rd Quarter Financials

Financial Assets as of 10/01/2011: \$73,490.43*

INCOME

Total Revenue: \$26,278.43

Pledges: \$6,187.50

EXPENSES

Land Loan Balance as of 10/01/2011: \$50,380.95

Land Loan Payment: \$497.50/month

Rent to Unitarian Church: \$840.00

Treasurer Bill Reddy reports that Blue Lotus had a big jump in revenue for the third quarter of the year due to a very generous donation of \$10,000.00 for the new temple. Also, funds from a few charitable fundraisers are recorded that will be paid out to those recipients after this report is published.

**The financial statement does not reflect any costs or expenses that the monks incur to sustain themselves, e.g., food, rent, clothing, sundries, gas, insurance, telephone, cable, etc.*

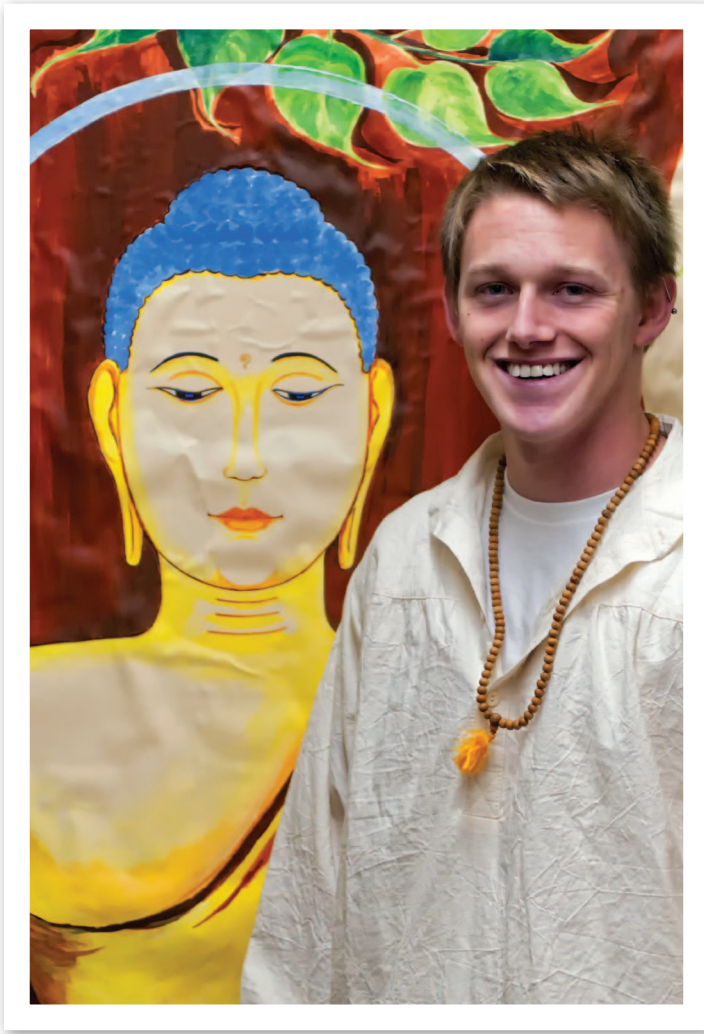
The Monastics do not receive any compensation from your generous donations to the Blue Lotus Temple.

If you wish to help support our monks, please write "Monk Expenses" in the note portion of your check.

Thank you for your generosity.

THE GOING FORTH OF VICTOR ABSIL

NOVICE BUDDHIST MONK ORDINATION CEREMONY



Join our Blue Lotus community as we celebrate the going forth of Victor Absil into the monastic life. The ceremony recognizing Victor's entry into the noble sangha as a samanera (novice monk) candidate will be held on December 3, 2011, preceding the Annual Blessing Ceremony of Blue Lotus Temple.

This moving and memorable ceremony is in the Theravada Buddhist tradition, under the preceptorship of Most Venerable Bhante Sujatha, Abbot of Blue Lotus Buddhist Temple, and witnessed by the Monastic Buddhist Sangha Chamber. The witness of the lay community of noble friends is a very important element of this occasion, as Victor makes a commitment to, and accepts reliance on, the noble sangha made up of both monastics and laypeople.

Victor is 23 and lives in Grayslake, Illinois. He is the son of Henry (now deceased) and Aileen Absil. Victor has two sisters and one brother. One sister lives in Wisconsin and his other siblings are in Illinois. He has an associate's degree in science and will continue his education as a philosophy major. He enjoys reading physics as well as Buddhist studies. He has been a soccer player since the age of four and loves all outdoor activities and sports, especially rock climbing, hiking, snowboarding and backpacking.

It is a rare and precious gift to experience a Going Forth ceremony and we hope you will join us in sharing this important event. Please welcome Victor into the monastic life with open arms and open hearts on December 3, 2011, at 3:00 p.m. 🌸

PLEASE JOIN US FOR THE GOING FORTH OF VICTOR ABSIL

NOVICE BUDDHIST MONK ORDINATION CEREMONY

DECEMBER 3, 2011, 3:00 P.M.

UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH

221 DEAN STREET WOODSTOCK, IL 60098

Tanzanians visit Blue Lotus Sangha

Blue Lotus member Angela Dampier and her guests from the nonprofit organization *It Can Be Done* spoke to the sangha in Woodstock on September 24. They shared information about ICBD's humanitarian efforts for clean water access in the foothills of Mt. Kilimanjaro, Tanzania, and shared ideas on how we can help their efforts.

Dramatic climate changes have created a great ice melt over the last 10 years, resulting in sudden and severe water shortages for the thousands of people living in this area. *It Can Be Done's* co-founder and President Barbara Joye shared the group's grassroots response to this catastrophic loss of the glacial waters and subsequent devastating loss of water supply for the Uru people.

Mr. Alphonse Ngowi, the Uru Water Borehole Project coordinator from Tanzania, spoke about the cooperative efforts of USA-based ICBD, along with Tanzania's Global Volunteers Programs Kilimanjaro NGO, villagers, and local and national Tanzanian government, to provide immediate water relief through deep water well drilling.

ICBD initiated relief efforts in 2006 and a maximum yield borehole was completed in 2010. The volume of water accessed is capable of supplying clean healthy water to over



Eva Ngowi, Angela Dampier, and Alphonse Ngowi after Blue Lotus presentation.

5,000 waiting people. Efforts have been underway ever since to acquire the additional funds needed to pump, pipe and distribute this water to the waiting Uru villages.

Women and children walk 3 to 5 hours a day on steep paths carrying water in 5 gallon buckets on their heads. With access to clean water, children will be able to attend school regularly. Women's workloads will be lightened, allowing them greater personal dignity and time to pursue means of income. Everyone will enjoy radically improved health.

Mr. Ngowi's wife, Eva, spoke to us about the life of Uru women and children now, and how the Uru women's empowerment initiatives are building skills for Fair Trade products and markets. She gave gifts of the items the women are making that will soon be a valuable source on income for the Uru villages.

Angela Dampier will climb 19,500 feet up Mt. Kilimanjaro, the tallest freestanding mountain on earth, in January, 2012, to raise awareness and funds for this project. To support her pledge climb or to learn more about the ICBD water project, as well as the Uru women's empowerment initiatives, please visit: www.itcanbedoneafrica.org.



Alphonse and Eva Ngowi present a plaque made by Uru women to Bhante Sujatha as Angela looks on.

IT CAN BE DONE welcomes all forms of support including participation in mission trips, Volunteers USA, pledge climb participants, funding donations and prayers.

From Sanatha Suwaya in Sri Lanka



Mike thanks the program hosts for the award given to him and Bhante Sujatha for humanitarian projects sponsored by our Blue Lotus Temple.



Krishan Gunasekara (Sanatha Suwaya support services) and Michael Fronczak (onsite director) receive the awards.

On September 24, 2011, Ven. Bhante Sujatha and Michael Fronczak received an award for the humanitarian efforts of the Blue Lotus Buddhist Temple and Sanatha Suwaya (a branch of the Blue Lotus in Sri Lanka) projects at the Jana Sarana Foundation's 7th Anniversary Celebration held at The Hotel Sapphire in Colombo, Sri Lanka. The award was received on behalf of Bhante Sujatha by Michael Fronczak (facilitator and resident instructor at Sanatha Suwaya) and Krishan Gunasekara (Sanatha Suwaya support services). Thanks to Mike and Krishan for their participation in this event and to all members of the Blue Lotus Sangha without whom these humanitarian works would not be possible. 🌸

Sri Lankan Cooking Class and Dinner



From left, Tamara Rhodes; Lydia Schmidt, hostess; Freda and Chandani, chefs and sponsors; and Freda's husband, a sponsor.



Freda Jayasinghe (left) and Chandani Liyanarchi were the chefs and teachers for the afternoon.



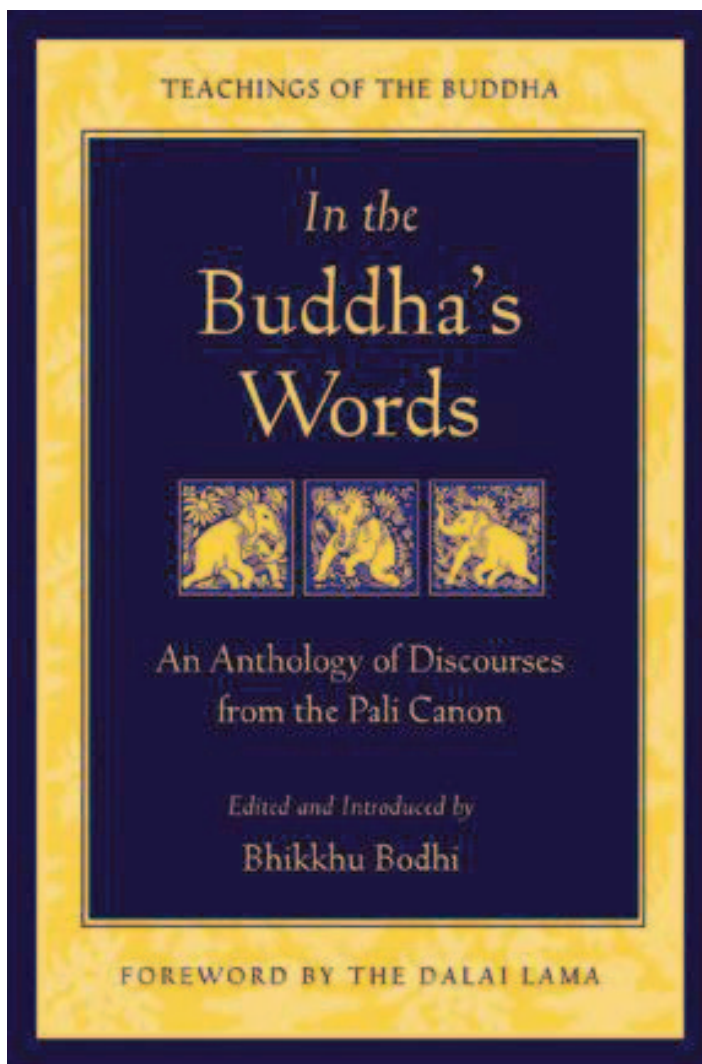
The Sri Lankan families of Silva, Jayasinghe, Arachchige, and Liyanarchi sponsored an incredible Sri Lankan Cooking Class and Dinner on October 29. While their husbands were great assistants, Freda Jayasinghe and Chandani Liyanarchi were the chefs and teachers for the afternoon. The fundraising event was hosted by Lydia and David Schmidt, and the group who

gathered had a most memorable afternoon. In addition to enjoying a Sri Lankan feast, the guests also learned about the preparation of traditional dishes and how to find and use the unique spices of Sri Lankan cooking. Guests also received the recipes for the dishes they enjoyed. Thanks to our wonderful Sri Lankan families for sharing their culture, their friendship, and their generosity with us! ❖

Book Review: In the Buddha's Words: An Anthology of Discourses from the Pali Canon

Edited and introduced by Bhikkhu Bodhi / Wisdom Publications; 2005; ISBN 0-86171-491-1

We've all read and heard about the various Buddhist doctrines (e.g. The Four Noble Truths, The Eight-Part Path, The Four Aggregates of Clinging), but most of us have never actually read the suttas where the Buddha first taught these ideas. If we endeavor to read the original suttas, we may be discouraged by the sheer volume of the words and ideas to be digested, the seeming disorganization of subject matter, the tiresome repetition of phrases, and the references to obscure subjects.



Bhikkhu Bodhi, the American monk, has trolled through the Pali canon to find the best explanations—in the Buddha's own words—of basic concepts and practices, and has arranged them in a graduated path leading from the world as it is to the world as it can be, and on to final liberation.

The book is divided into ten chapters:

The Human Condition

The Bringer of Light [the Buddha]

Approaching the Dhamma

The Happiness Visible in this Present Life

The Way to a Fortunate Rebirth

Deepening One's Perspective on the World

The Path to Liberation

Mastering the Mind

Shining the Light of Wisdom

The Planes of Realization

A scan of the chapter headings shows that this book will appeal not only to advanced practitioners on the path, but also to beginners. The suttas have been edited to eliminate repetitious phrases, and have been translated into “modern” English—without “thees” and “thous.” You will be surprised by some of the subject matter the Buddha calls upon to illustrate his ideas!

At the start of each chapter, Bhikkhu Bodhi offers his excellent explanations of the coming subject matter. Each sutta is well footnoted. (My one complaint is that you'll need two bookmarkers—one for the sutta, and one for the matching notes at the back of the book.)

The book includes a foreword by the Dalai Lama in which he says, “[This book] shows so clearly how much fundamentally all schools of Buddhism have in common.” The book also includes a guide to Pali pronunciation (but it's still difficult!), a glossary, and several indices arranged by Subject, Proper Names, Similes, Sutta Titles, and Pali Terms.

This my favorite book. Thank you so much, Bhikkhu Bodhi, for compiling it. From its pages, the powerful light of the wisdom and compassion of the World Honored One shines down through all the weary ages right into our own hearts and minds. ❀

Audio Review: “Putting Out the Fires in Your Mind”

By Sandra Larkin, CWPM, IC

Plain and simple, I love this CD and it’s changed my life.



CD AVAILABLE FOR PURCHASE ON OUR WEBSITE

Every day we’re faced with fires in our minds. Traffic jams, issues in the workplace, challenges at home, as well as personal fires we create ourselves—we all need a little meditation and personal loving kindness to get over the bumps and move on before they turn into a raging forest fire. To listen to and learn the meditative practice, then to put it into place, brings us to a centering position where we are able to be more effective and impactful to those around us.

I have found that listening to *Putting Out the Fires in your Mind* extinguishes those fires when it’s most needed. My car becomes a place of peace, my home a place of solitude, my mind a quiet space as I spend precious minutes with Bhante Sujatha. I feel truly blessed by his knowledge and peaceful guidance.

I highly recommend this CD and that listening to it becomes a critical part of your personal wellness plan. As we all know, stress can be detrimental to your health. *Putting Out the Fires in your Mind* puts stress into perspective as you become not only a silent observer but an active participant in extinguishing those fires. 🌸

Sandra Larkin is Certified Wellness Program Manager Intrinsic Health Coach www.sandralarkin.com

These are questions that some of you may have thought of to ask about the monks, the practice, or even temple business. In the future, you can write in with any questions or concerns that you may have. We will feature *Ask Bhante* on a regular basis if there is enough response and interest. Send your questions to vimalajf@gmail.com with the subject line, “Ask Bhante.”

Remember that you may have a question or a thought that concerns many of us and we haven’t thought to ask.



DEAR BHANTE SUJATHA,

WHAT IS YOUR GOAL AS A MONK, AND DO YOU EVER GET FRUSTRATED OR DISHEARTENED?

THANK YOU

Dear Friend,

My goal is to help myself develop spiritually and also to help others, in whatever ways are open to me. Yes, I do get frustrated and disheartened, but I know how to deal with my frustrations through mindfulness practice. That is what our practice is all about—dealing with *dukkha* that each one of us experiences as a human being. We all have to be diligent in our practice—even me!

Metta,
Bhante Sujatha

Theravada and Mahayana



Words are limited and confusing to people. I think that words help us, but sometimes they make troubles for us. Today we will talk about the differences between *Mahayana* and *Theravada*.

I have studied *Mahayana* for many years and the more I study it, the more I find there are hardly any differences between *Theravada* and *Mahayana* with regard to the fundamental teachings.

- Both accept Sakyamuni Buddha as the Teacher.
- The Four Noble Truths are exactly the same in both schools.
- The Eightfold Path is exactly the same in both schools.
- The *Paticca-samuppada* or Dependent Origination is the same in both schools.
- Both rejected the idea of a supreme being who created and governed this world.
- Both accept *Anicca, Dukkha, Anatta, and Sila, Samadhi, Panna*, without any differences.

These are the most important teachings of the Buddha and they are all accepted by both schools without question.

There are also some points where they differ. An obvious one is the *Bodhisattva* ideal. Many people say that *Mahayana* teaches *Bodhisattvahood*, which leads to Buddhahood, while *Theravada* teaches *Arahantship*. I must point out that the Buddha was also an Arahant. Pacceka Buddha is also an Arahant. A disciple can also be an Arahant. The Mahayana texts never use the term Arahant-yana (Arahant

Vehicle). They used three terms: *Bodhisattvayana, Prateka-Buddhayana*, and *Sravakayana*. In the Theravada tradition these three are called *Bodhis*.

Some people imagine that Theravada is selfish because it teaches that people should seek their own salvation. But how can a selfish person gain Enlightenment? Both schools accept the three Yanas or *Bodhis*, but consider the *Bodhisattva* ideal as the highest. The *Mahayana* has created many mystical *Bodhisattvas* while the *Theravada* considers a *Bodhisattva* as a man amongst us who devotes his entire life for the attainment of perfection, ultimately becoming a fully Enlightened Buddha for the welfare of the world, for the happiness of the world.

THREE TYPES OF BUDDHAHOOD

There are three types of Buddhahood: the *Samma Sambuddha* who gains full Enlightenment by his own effort; the *Pacceka Buddha* who has lesser qualities than the *Samma Sambuddha*, and the *Savaka Buddha* who is an Arahant disciple. The attainment of Nibbana between the three types of Buddhahood is exactly the same. The only difference is that the *Samma Sambuddha* has many more qualities and capacities than the other two.

Some people think that Voidness or *Sunyata* discussed by Nagarjuna is purely a *Mahayana* teaching. It is based on the idea of *Anatta* or non-self, on the *Paticcasamuppada* or the Dependent Origination, found in the original Theravada Pali texts. Once Ananda asked the Buddha, “People say the word *Sunya*. What is *Sunya*?” The Buddha replied, “Ananda, there is no self, nor anything pertaining to self in this world. Therefore, the world is empty.” This idea was taken by Nagarjuna when he wrote his remarkable book, “*Madhyamika Karika*.” Besides the idea of *Sunyata* is the concept of the store-consciousness in Mahayana Buddhism which has its seed in the Theravada texts. The Mahayanists have developed it into a deep psychology and philosophy. •

MEETINGS WITH BHANTE SUJATHA

Many people want to have a one-on-one meeting with Bhante Sujatha. If you would like to schedule one, please contact him at mail@bluelotustemple.org or call 815-444-8915.

TAKING REFUGE IN THE TRIPLE GEM

1. FOR LIFE, WE TAKE REFUGE IN THE BUDDHA.
2. FOR LIFE, WE TAKE REFUGE IN THE DHAMMA.
3. FOR LIFE, WE TAKE REFUGE IN THE SANGHA.

THE FIVE PRECEPTS

1. I UNDERTAKE THE PRECEPT TO REFRAIN FROM DESTROYING LIVING CREATURES.
2. I UNDERTAKE THE PRECEPT TO REFRAIN FROM TAKING THAT WHICH IS NOT GIVEN.
3. I UNDERTAKE THE PRECEPT TO REFRAIN FROM SEXUAL MISCONDUCT.
4. I UNDERTAKE THE PRECEPT TO REFRAIN FROM SAYING ANYTHING THAT WILL HARM OTHERS.
5. I UNDERTAKE THE PRECEPT TO REFRAIN FROM INTOXICATING DRINKS AND DRUGS WHICH LEAD TO CARELESSNESS.

THE EIGHT LIFETIME PRECEPTS

1. WE ARE NOT TO KILL ANY LIVING THING.
2. WE ARE NOT TO TAKE ANYTHING THAT DOES NOT BELONG TO US.
3. WE ARE NOT TO COMMIT SEXUAL MISCONDUCT.
4. WE ARE NOT TO TELL ANYTHING THAT WILL HARM OTHERS.
5. WE WILL ABSTAIN FROM MALICIOUS SPEECH.
6. WE WILL ABSTAIN FROM HARSH SPEECH.
7. WE WILL ABSTAIN FROM USELESS SPEECH.
8. WE WILL ABSTAIN FROM ENGAGING IN WRONG LIVELIHOOD.

Five Precepts Reflection

by Diane Brodson



Hello, Kalyanamittas!
My Noble Friends!

I took the first five precepts after listening to Ven. Vimala’s dharma talk a few weeks before the ceremony. I had been wondering whether or not it was time for me to take the next step. After all, I have been reading about

“Buddhism” since the late 1980s.

A lifetime ago, my husband died from an asthma attack when he was 34 years old—leaving me with two daughters: Rebecca was 6 ½; Nora was 17 months old. I had been raised in a secular home (and so had my husband), but Jim at least had Jewish roots; I had no religious upbringing whatsoever. I took the girls to the Unitarian Church in Deerfield, Illinois, because about a third of the congregation had Jewish roots as well. So in addition to celebrating Christmas, the Unitarian Church observed Passover, Yom Kippur and Hanukah. I became disenchanted with “going to church” after a few years and found instead the Himalayan Institute in Glenview where I took yoga, classes in meditation, vegetarian cooking, and Tai Chi.

In 1990, I began working at the Arlington Heights Memorial Library, where I met my first bodhisattva—a co-worker—who pointed me in the direction of books by Thich Nhat Hanh. I attended the Udumbara Zen Center in Evanston for a while; however, Zen was not a path for me. For a couple of years I meditated in a small group (meeting at the Unitarian Church in Deerfield) where we read books by Pema Chodron and, of course, Chogyam Trungpa’s *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism*. Meditation was almost impossible for me: I have tinnitus. The constant ringing in my ears seemed to get louder when I tried to sit in quiet. I needed a teacher!

Through Common Ground in Deerfield I met wonderful teachers: Jim Kenny, Ron Miller and Laura Bernstein. Laura’s meditation group meets every other Monday evening

at Common Ground. Finally, her teachings from Sri Eknath Easwaran’s passage meditation worked for me. The idea is to memorize spiritual passages that speak to you...and then, meditate on each word as you slowly say the passage in your mind. Saying the words in my mind, concentrating on the words, seemed to mask the tinnitus.

I discovered that all the spiritual passages that spoke to me were from the Buddhist and Hindu traditions: “All that we are is the result of what we have thought; we are formed and molded by our thoughts.” “Just as a mother, with her own life, defends her child, her only child from harm, so within yourself let grow a boundless love for all creatures.” “Release me from my sorrows which hold me as ropes hold a calf.” “You are your deep driving desire.”

Then, just by chance, through the Internet, I met my second bodhisattva: Hope Martin. When Hope wrote a column about a soap opera, I sent her a grateful fan-email. We discovered that we both practiced Buddhist meditation in a Unitarian church and we lived 35 minutes from one another! After corresponding through email for several months, we finally met outside the Unitarian Church of Woodstock. Through Hope, I have entered a new community, a sangha of like-minded people. People who are delighted by Bhante Sujatha, his smile, and his path of loving-kindness.

And yet, it was listening to Vimala that Saturday that helped me make up my mind. I’m almost there on the first Five Precepts. I rescue spiders from the bathtub before I shower. I capture them and release them into the garage or into my houseplants. But I still eat meat and I have an occasional glass of wine with dinner. I worry about my aging cat. I have ended the suffering of pets in the past; how can I watch pets suffer? Taking the Precepts, for me, means I am making a commitment to cultivate my mind, to become a better human being. I want to be more mindful of how I speak and act. I still eat meat and have a glass of wine on occasion—but it won’t be without thinking: I am on a path to eat less meat, to give up a glass of wine, to think before I speak, to be of service to others, to become a better human being. ❀

Taking the 10 Bodhisattva Vows

by Pam Larson



THE 10 BODHISATTVA VOWS ARE:

GENEROSITY (DANA)

MORALITY (SILA)

RENUNCIATION (NEKKHAMMA)

WISDOM (PANNA)

ENERGY/STRENGTH (VIRIYA)

PATIENCE (KHANTI)

TRUTHFULNESS (SACCA)

RESOLUTION/DETERMINATION (ADHITTHANA)

LOVING KINDNESS (METTA)

EQUANIMITY (UPEKKA)

I look forward to the annual Precepts Ceremony because it is such a beautiful and touching experience. To me, it is a celebration of embarking on a beautiful journey, where we vow to “live an exemplary life to be worthy of a Buddha’s disciple.”

This year I took the Bodhisattva vows and, to be honest, it surprised me to be compelled to do this. Still just a baby practitioner, the teachings have become so important in my life that I don’t envision living any other way. At first I would gauge my progress by comparing myself to “now and then” or “before and after the Blue Lotus.” It was very helpful for me to see the changes in myself and my life. The changes felt genuine and lasting.

There are so many ways to incorporate the Buddha’s teachings into one’s life, as there are as many ways as there are individual beings. But, I think the most important aspect is how you feel about your life, the good things you do without effort, the love and compassion that you feel for others.

I thought for a long time that taking the Bodhisattva vows meant committing to something similar to becoming a monk or nun. I thought it meant you were extremely knowledgeable of all the Buddha’s teachings and that you had a complete understanding of Buddhism.

This is not the case. I now know that Buddhism is a lifelong path, and we never stop learning and growing. I no longer

compare my past self to my current self. There’s no need for that. These qualities were within me all along. I just didn’t understand that following this path, practicing meditation and loving kindness, and being a good human being was all I needed to be happy and peaceful.

I still read and learn and try to understand more about the Buddha and his teachings. Each day I look within and am thankful for every person encountered along this journey, and look forward to the new experiences and friends to come.

When you are ready to take vows, hopefully you will feel it in your heart and know that you are already that person you are committing to become. You don’t have to be perfect. You don’t have to know everything. You don’t have to stand out from the crowd. Just be part of the process—the process of looking within, following the Noble Eightfold Path, being an example, sharing your loving kindness, and being open to understanding.

“I have already taken refuge in the Buddha. I shall work hard to develop my Buddha Nature.”

“I have already taken refuge in the Dharma. I shall make a determination to learn and understand it.”

“I have already taken refuge in the Sangha. I shall be a true friend, and seek and respect noble friends.”

May you be well, happy and peaceful. ❁

Pam met Bhante Sujatha and the Blue Lotus in the Summer of 2008. Since then, she reports finding much happiness and peace. She and her husband live in Crystal Lake, near the monks’ residence, with three dogs and one African Dwarf frog named Yoda. She recently began working with the Pioneer Center for Human Resources and is excited to be part of such a noble organization.

Why did I take the Five Precepts?

by David Schmidt



Personally, I took the precepts a long time ago. And only now, thanks in no small part to Bhante Sujatha and all the monastics of Blue Lotus Temple, am I beginning to understand some of their true meaning.

Besides taking refuge in the Buddha, the dhamma (teachings), and the sangha (community), I also see that I take refuge in those three refuges that exist within the self. Meaning that the Buddha, or Buddha nature, is within each of us. The teachings are there, and the community is there. We all have everything we need to live compassionately and genuinely.

By taking the Precepts this year, it is my open and loving statement to our community and to the World that I have chosen to live my life in a way that is of benefit to all others. It is a personal determination that is actually not about me, but of our connectedness. And love for each other.

This, for me, was never felt more strongly than on the day of the ceremony. The room was filled with an abundance of love and community.

People who had previously taken the precepts told me how they just glowed for the whole day after the ceremony. Some even said they felt it for several days afterward. I was not sure I believed that until it happened to me! I think this is the real meaning of mudita (sympathetic joy). My family and I were overcome with this feeling, and it did indeed last the whole weekend.

Thank you, Blue Lotus Temple; thank you, Sangha; and thank you, Buddha. 🌸

The Five Precepts

by David Schmidt (edited from his blog)

Having recently taken the Five Precepts at the Blue Lotus annual ceremony, many friends and family members have asked me to explain what the precepts mean in our Buddhist tradition. This has also opened up a discussion to understand more deeply what it means personally to undertake these precepts.

First of all, precepts are not rules or laws. Precepts are a commitment to the self in making a strong determination to live a compassionate life, and one that is of benefit to all sentient beings. I would like to offer my personal understanding on the full intentions contained within each precept.

1. I TAKE THE PRECEPT TO GIVE UP KILLING.

The simple understanding of this, of course, would be that we do not kill any person. But a fuller understanding would be that we would not be the cause of any other sentient being to suffer or die. One example of this is in eating meat. When we eat meat, we are the indirect cause of suffering and killing. But it is up to the individual to decide just how fully he or she wishes to undertake this intention and precept.

2. I TAKE THE PRECEPT TO GIVE UP STEALING.

We usually thinking of stealing in terms of robbing a bank or grocery store. But there are many more ways we may steal. We can steal ideas and hopes. Our actions towards our children can steal their future.

3. I TAKE THE PRECEPT TO GIVE UP SEXUAL MISCONDUCT.

This one always garners a lot of questions! For me, I think any actions outside of legal, ethical and good morality would certainly qualify as sexual misconduct.

4. I TAKE THE PRECEPT TO GIVE UP LYING.

At first glance, this may appear to be easy to understand and undertake. But at a deeper level, we look at the honesty we hold toward the self. This can be much more difficult than being honest towards others. Do you demonstrate outward kindness to others, yet sometimes harbor resentment or hostility towards that very same person?

Examining our words and actions to observe their genuineness is a key to the cessation of lying.

5. I TAKE THE PRECEPT TO GIVE UP DRINKING LIQUOR AND TAKING SUBSTANCES THAT LEAD TO INTOXICATION AND CARELESSNESS.

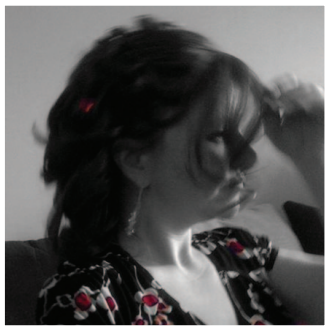
This is another precept that draws many questions. Many people find they are comfortable taking this precept as long as they can occasionally have a glass of wine or beer. And while this is permissible, the higher intention of this precept is complete abstinence of anything that affects ones thinking or reason.

Personally, I would take this a step further in saying that I am to be mindful and dutiful in everything that I put into my body.

So that's it, the Five Precepts and my personal examination of them. May we all live compassionately and in peace with one another. 🌸

Taking the 8 Precepts: 2011 Precepts Ceremony

by Candy Cotsiomitis



The day I took the eight precepts was one of the most important days of my life. Inside, I felt I was always meant to take them and embrace them in my heart and mind. For once, it was *I* who was making the decision. It was *I* who was taking the vows from my heart and it was because *I* wanted to take them, not because it was something that was forced upon me by others or something to do because it was “part of (my) religion.”

Sitting in front of Bhante with the entire Sangha and my family there, for the first time it felt like I was right where I was supposed to be. Taking the precepts has transformed the way that I look at everything I do, all my feelings, reactions, sensations and the feelings and reactions of others. The precepts have enabled me.

Admittedly, I have faltered, but then again the purpose of the precepts is not about getting in trouble or “going to hell” if you do falter. They are a guide to right mind and right action. Since I took the precepts, I feel I have been a more tolerant and accepting person. I have been more tolerant of myself and of others’ actions. In a way, I feel purified. I feel well, happy, and peaceful in spite of whatever is going on in my life.

Metta, friends. ♡

Expectations by Hope Martin



*What people expect
to happen is
always different
from what actually happens.
From this comes great
disappointment; this is
the way the world works.*

—Sutta Nipata

Last week, we got new bedroom windows. They are lovely and a new style. The old ones opened by sliding across like a patio door, the new ones slide up, so the center divide is gone, giving, after many years, an entirely new outlook.

At first, it didn’t seem right. I was not sure I was going to be happy with the new view; it wasn’t what I was used to. But after a few hours, I was realizing how much I love the new windows and the new outlook! They are energy efficient, pretty and so easy to clean.

So often when we make a change in our lives for the better, things do start to change, but not always in the way we expected! What happens is they change the way they are supposed to, and we start learning what we have to change in ourselves to make it work.

Following the path is not going to make us win the lottery or even have a boss be nicer; it simply shows us how to deal with all of it, with a new outlook... ♡

Poem by Julie Gibson

Pain beyond utterance
blood dripping
on-the-hour
from teeth marks on
beating bag of guts and dreams.
Still following
not wanting to know better
needing a smaller brain with no self
to defend
to mock
to tip off the edge.

(Author’s comment: A bit dark, but guess that’s how I felt on 7/1/09 at 3a.m....) ♡

Attention

by Jim Kail



When joining a meditation group for the first time, one immediately is struck by the fact that Buddha was all about focused attention. Sitting on our cushions, we are told to put our attention on our breath, an image, a phrase, something. Later, off the cushion, we are told to put our attention on the moment and keep it off the future or past.

We also learn that Buddha's purpose was to decrease our suffering and increase our happiness. What is the connection between attention and happiness?

Daniel Simons is a psychologist at the University of Illinois. He did what is now a classic experiment where a group of people in a room were shown a 25 second film. In the film, six basketball players stood in a circle and passed two basketballs to each other randomly. The players changed places in the circle, weaving in and out to make a complex scene.

The viewers of the film were told that they were in a contest to see who could count most accurately the number of times the basketballs were passed. After the film, the viewers wrote down their number. Then, Dr. Simons asked them a surprising question, "How many people saw the gorilla?"

More than half of the viewers asked, "What gorilla?" When the same film was replayed for them, it could plainly be seen that a man in a gorilla suit walks into the circle of players for nine full seconds and thumps his chest before walking off the set.

Because their focused attentions were on counting the passes, they didn't even see the gorilla! This experiment has since been repeated many times with the same result. It

demonstrates an important fact of our brains. The human brain is organized in such a way that we can only put our attention on one thing at a time. This is why car accidents occur while people speak on cell phones, and everyone knows how hard it is to write an e-mail while talking on the phone.

It appears that we can multi-task, but this is a delusion. We rapidly change our attentions from one thing to another—one at a time. When we focus on one thing, the others are out of our minds in a sense. I believe that Buddha came to understand this fact by studying his mind through introspection. And this was such an important fact!

He must have been frustrated by the lack of ways to influence or change his mind to lessen mental suffering. No drugs in those days. But he realized he could control his attention, which turned out to be a most powerful tool.

When we meditate, we are like the viewers of the basketball film. Instead of the basketballs, we put our full attentions on our breaths. The "gorillas" that are outside our attention are fears, worries, emotions, stories, thoughts, desires, and anything else our monkey minds generate. Some of these "gorillas" make us suffer mentally, but only if we have our attentions on them.

This is an avoidance strategy, but it clearly works! I have a fear of heights and suffer when I need to fly. However, if I have a conversation with the passenger next to me, my suffering lessens. My attention is not on plane accidents, but rather on our conversation.

Buddhist teachings also instruct us to keep our attention on the present moment. This avoids the gorillas (disturbing thoughts or emotions) that live in the past or the future.

The clear result is less suffering. This strategy helps our minds avoid disturbing occurrences, resulting in less suffering and, just as important, a calmer mind. But it's temporary and superficial and won't do in the long run!

We cannot successfully engage with the world by running away from the things in our minds that make us suffer. If this strategy was all there was to Buddha's teachings, we would be "zoning out" all the time. We'd be in trouble.

Recently, however, Bhante Sujatha made clear to us that breath focusing is just one stage of formal meditation. It is the beginner's stage. It is necessary for a clear, calm, unfettered mind, but another stage must be employed. This stage involves putting our attentions on and facing the very things that disturb us. The attention is now focused on our minds.

But by this stage, the attention is being refined and changed with practice. It is not just awareness, but awareness with a special attitude and knowledge. It is calm, curious, accepting with lovingkindness. It's a wise attention. This is mindfulness. Now insights are possible and I think the real chance for happiness begins. ❁

Blue Lotus Camping Retreat: Summer 2011

by Jim Kail

Calm, warm summer afternoons spent meditating with noble friends in the cool shade of a giant maple next to a lake. Discussing Buddhist ideas by a campfire under the full moon. Stars. Jokes and laughter. Meeting new people and making new friends. Another awesome Blue Lotus camping retreat this year.

Camping and Buddhism just plain fit together. Most of the Sutta stories take place in parks and forests. Buddha achieved enlightenment outside under a tree. We practice loving kindness toward all living beings, and camping reminds us that it is an illusion that we are separate from them and special. We aren't. This illusion is perpetrated by our buildings and autos, where we isolate ourselves inside so much of our time.

Camping at Rock Cut State Park, we are no longer separate. We're outside

where we share our world with myriad living creations. Time slows down and we see details with clarity moment to moment. A huge vulture lands next to the cabin. A flock of wild turkeys with their young walk out of the forest. Bees sip drops of left-over breakfast juice on the picnic table. A spider with long, impossibly thin legs delicately walks up my arm. And at night in our tents—what sounds! Weird and wonderful hoots, shrieks, cries, clicks, whistles that are thousands of years old. What a show! Slithering, flying, buzzing, swimming, living, dying beings all around us. We feel smaller now in this cathedral of evolution and just another variation of life—all connected, none separate.

Many thanks to Bhante San for leading us in a more in-depth, insight meditation going through the stages. Thanks go to Venerable Vimala for

setting her usual example of calm, smiling wisdom. And for bringing along her two impish Scottish terriers who provide endless entertainment. And to Becky and Corey and Erik for joining us Saturday afternoon and evening. And lastly, thanks to Glen Ebey who makes this event possible every year. He organizes the event, rents the cabin, creates the menu, writes a schedule for events, brings firewood, cooks vegetarian feasts, and brings the heavens closer with his cool telescope. Without him, there would be no event—no precious memories for many of us from each event in the last five years.

I've had the privilege to attend this retreat for the last three years and when all of us go our separate ways at the end on Sunday afternoon, we feel somewhat down, but the event then reminds us of two last lessons—impermanence and non-attachment. ❁

Jim Kail is a retired chemist who lives in Woodstock with his wife, Linda. He enjoys jogging, biking, playing his keyboard, and trying to understand the mind using both science and Buddhism.

Meditating on Loving Kindness (Forgiveness)

A guided meditation by Ven. Ayya Khema

Please put the attention on the breath.

Have forgiveness in your heart for anything you think you've done wrong. Forgive yourself for all the past omissions and commissions. They are long gone. Understand that you were a different person and this one is forgiving that one that you were. Feel that forgiveness filling you and enveloping you with a sense of warmth and ease.

Think of your parents. Forgive them for anything you have ever blamed them for. Understand that they too are different now. Let this forgiveness fill them, surround them, knowing in your heart that this is your most wonderful way of togetherness.

Think of your nearest and dearest people. Forgive them for anything that you think they have done wrong or are doing wrong at this time. Fill them with your forgiveness. Let them feel that you accept them. Let that forgiveness fill them. Realizing that this is your expression of love.

Now think of your friends. Forgive them for anything you have disliked about them. Let your forgiveness reach out to them, so that they can be filled with it, embraced by it.

Think of the people you know, whoever they might be, and forgive them all for whatever it is that you have blamed them for, that you have judged them for, that you have disliked. Let your forgiveness fill their hearts, surround them, envelope them, be your expression of love for them.

Now think of any special person whom you really need to forgive, towards whom you still have resentment, rejection, dislike. Forgive him or her fully. Remember that everyone has dukkha. Let this forgiveness come from your heart. Reach out to that person, completely and totally.

Think of any one person, or any situation, or any group of people you are condemning, blaming, disliking. Forgive them, completely. Let your forgiveness be your expression of unconditional love. They may not do the right things. Human beings have dukkha. And your heart needs the forgiveness in order to have purity of love.

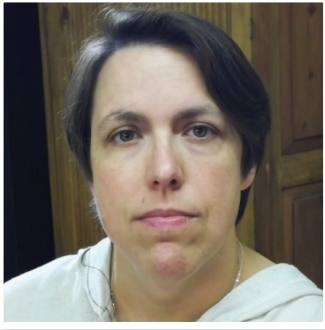
Have a look again and see whether there's anyone or anything, anywhere in the world, towards whom you have blame or condemnation. And forgive the people or the person, so that there is no separation in your heart.

Now put your attention back on yourself. And recognize the goodness in you. The effort you are making. Feel the warmth and ease that comes from forgiveness.

May all beings have forgiveness in their hearts. ❀

Reflections on Monthly Sutta Class

by Rose Huegen



The very Sutta study itself is an example of the teachings of Buddha. Each person brings a different perspective to the group. They each have different life lessons that have shaped who they are and as such have different ways of understanding. The group setting is important as a way to move beyond the barrier of translated languages, gender, age, environment and culture. Each person is both the teacher and the student at the Sutta study, for we all contribute to the learning and understanding of the lessons the Buddha taught.

The thing that binds us all together is the sharing of teachings. People are not forced to come, people are not required to better themselves—so the people who do come have already made the decisions for themselves to evolve. They thirst for knowledge and wisdom and by being a part of a group study such as this they are reaching out to others and engendering a sense of community that is not only aware but actively seeking to journey down the road of Enlightenment.

Each class, each meditation, each retreat, each activity of the Blue Lotus community is a small stone upon the road of the Enlightenment journey. It is a journey taken together, to be shared among those that are ready for the journey. It is a causal relationship—for those who were not ready would not have sought out the community, and those who are a part of the community

enable it to continue and grow to be there for when others are ready for such steps.

Each person, though in different places upon the road can all walk together. The journey does not have a set length, a set time—for each journey is our own journey. It is paved with our own obstacles and it is our own skill which will examine them and learn to remove them. Those who walk with us are there to help us when we fall, share their joy when a new lesson is learned or an obstacle overcome.

We are all like the lotus petals surrounding the jewel in the center, which is the path of Enlightenment. We all hold the lotus blossom in our hands and through the studies and practices, we slowly peel away the petals, absorbing the wisdom contained within. We are each a lotus blossom, our real center hidden with the petals of our worldly lives.

THOUGHTS SPECIFICALLY ON THE BLEMISH SUTTA GROUP

This was a very good session as it discussed the importance of understanding those obstacles within us which give rise to our suffering. It is important not only to be able to see them but to understand them so that we may overcome them. In using the imagery of the flowing stream which leads to Enlightenment, the obstacles could be seen as rocks and debris which have fallen in our stream and have slowed the natural flow to a trickle or have diverted it altogether

We all hold the lotus blossom in our hands and through the studies and practices, we slowly peel away the petals, absorbing the wisdom contained within.

(delusion). I did not have the time to point out something I thought might be helpful to understanding delusion, which was a topic brought up and not understood well.

The base word is delude, which means to lead astray. Delusion could therefore be seen as our thoughts acts and beliefs which lead us astray from the reality that Buddha has shown us about how the world truly is. I think it is important to understand that everything starts out with the thought. We do not get dressed in the morning without the thought to get dressed. Our life experiences shape our thoughts and our beliefs and it is those thoughts and beliefs that are made into acts. And so, we must start by sharpening our minds, developing our wisdom so that our thoughts lead us forward on the path we have chosen, rather than to the side or even in reverse of our goals.

I think it is also important to point out that the concept behind the lesson is always neutral. By attaching the words of blemish, poison or sin to something we will think negative thoughts as our culture has taught us these things are bad or not to be desired. Obstacle is something we are taught is to be overcome and sparks action in our minds. It becomes a challenge for us to complete rather than something bad that needs to be purged. Many of the teachings I have come across (not just spiritual ones) point out that to purge something is escapist and the easy way out of having to deal with it.

Take Bhante's example of the desire for the new car. He gave in to the desire to purchase it—the easy way out. By giving in, he did not have to struggle against it and he must now live with the consequences of knowing that the money he has spent on payments could have gone towards other things. Rather than purge the desire by giving in, he should have taken a step back from the desire and examined it to understand why he felt it, where it came from and where it would take him to. I think a good rule of thumb is that if you have to talk yourself into it, you need to step away and rethink the decision.

In our everyday lives we encounter things which add to our suffering and by applying the Four Noble Truths much like the scientific method of experiments, we can make the dissemination process into a habit that will help us on our journey. There was a discussion focused around anger as an example.

1. We know there is anger within us as even a child may feel anger at something. The anger is not a good thing or a bad thing, we simply acknowledge it is there. It arises and it will go away.
2. We must come to understand the anger we feel. What made us angry, what perceptions do we hold about this act/person/thing/thought that contribute to this anger. Where are we directing it and why.
3. What can we do to change the environment so that the anger does not arise in the future
4. What was done (the path out of anger)

So as an example, I will use my own experience of road rage. I acknowledged I had it as I wouldn't be able to drive anywhere without usually cursing or commenting or giving people the middle finger when they cut me off. It took me awhile before I figured out that my anger was coming from my perception of the need to be places fast and that people should know better and not drive in hazardous ways. When I discovered the reason why, I then asked myself why it was so important for me to be at my destination that whole minute faster when I always leave early to begin with. I asked myself why it mattered whether the person who cut me off was in front of me or behind me. When I understood that these things didn't matter, traffic started bothering me way less. I still have my moments when someone does something way off the safety scale but the red lights and heavy traffic don't affect me like they used to. I have learned to let it go, which was the path out of anger. 🍀

Rose lives near the monks' residence in Crystal Lake, IL, with her boyfriend, Charles, and her dog and cat. Her journey includes being a seeker of knowledge and she could be called an amateur theologian. Outdoor activities, reading, and computers are among her interests. She is an accountant by trade and a student part time, completing her bachelor's degree in accountancy/business management.

The Path to Easing Anxiety

By: Courtenay Hill Wilson

My personal meditation practice began as doctor's orders, and I truly did not believe that "sitting there" could possibly curb the turmoil in my head. For many years I had suffered from knock-down, drag-out panic attacks, the worst part being that they rarely seemed to have a point to them. I was not afraid of anything specific, and the dreaded question, "What are you scared of?" made it even worse. My anxiety was, for the most part, undefined, and could creep up on me while I was relaxed and happy or just minding my own business.

A true panic attack is not a fit of nervousness. It is a sensation that begins with a feeling of dread in the pit of the stomach, escalating to sweating, shaking, nausea, and racing thoughts of dreadful things. It is the brain telling one quite clearly that there IS something to be afraid of, very afraid, and that something terrible will happen if one does not heed the warnings. Fringe benefits are feelings of shame and weakness and even guilt, because the attacks can be very debilitating and obvious, and effect those surrounding the person suffering the attack.

I was under a wonderful doctor's care. He talked with me endlessly, suggested helpful books and gave great advice, most of which I followed. I avoided caffeine and certain foods, tried to get enough sleep and stay awake during daylight hours. I took medication, carefully monitored by my doctor. But when he prescribed "MEDITATION," I thought he was way off base, because to me being alone with my thoughts was the worst thing in the world.

Then I met Bhante Sujatha. It took me weeks of classes to get up the courage to speak with him privately. When I did, I asked for his help with my anxiety, and he has been helping me for almost five years.

I'd like to share this most valuable gift. The first thing Bhante stressed was that I needn't be ashamed to take medication if it is needed and if it is given by a competent doctor. I would not be reprimanded or drummed out of the class or the sangha for taking good care of myself. He did smile and tell me that there may come a day when I would not need as much medication as I was taking, but that I shouldn't worry about it.

He taught me that meditation is in fact a practice, something to work on and build on. He said sitting alone with no guidance, allowing my thoughts to race and take hold of me, was not going to be helpful. The main lesson, one I am still working on, is how to let my thoughts pass by with non-harming fluidity, not giving them any power. This is something I can strive for at all times, not just on the cushion.

During an anxiety attack, there is the temptation to grab hold of a thought and worry it, like a dog with a bone. Bhante teaches me to stop clinging to thoughts, and to have some trust that nothing terrible will happen.

Another very important lesson is learning to breathe, something I took for granted. Bhante taught me that I do have control over my breath, that I needn't let it grow shallow and hectic. During an anxiety attack, one's breath can be a

During an anxiety attack, there is the temptation to grab hold of a thought and worry it, like a dog with a bone. Bhante teaches me to stop clinging to thoughts, and to have some trust that nothing terrible will happen.

worst enemy or a best friend. Out-of-control breathing is what causes anxiety to build and allows for the physical sensations of dizziness and nausea to follow. If the breath is kept deep and even, one has some control over the body.

Again, this is something I use as a constant lesson, being mindful of my breath throughout my day. And during my actual meditation practice, these lessons are reinforced so that they “stick,” which is why meditation is important, instead of merely remaining mindful of one’s breath. Meditation is the learning, being mindful is the homework.

Of course, meditation and mindfulness are the intense subjects of myriad articles, books, lectures and discussions, and are not to be simplified in a handful of paragraphs. Neither is the horror of full-blown anxiety attacks. However, my story is fairly easy to explain, and I believe it has a positive ending, although it isn’t finished...nor do I want it to be.

Like everyone else, I am a work-in-progress. But I have not had an all-encompassing, terrifying, mind-blowing panic attack since I accepted I had the power to “let go,” and by that I mean I can allow my thoughts to flow by like air currents, and I can be mindful of keeping my breath regular and even. I must say the hardest part is the trust issue: trust that nothing catastrophic will happen if I don’t give at least a passing nod to the alarming thoughts threatenng to form.

So, in addition to remembering the now well-known phrase “well, happy, and peaceful,” I keep the image of Bhante Sujatha’s smiling face in mind, and also my favorite of his phrases: “What to do? Who cares?”

Courtenay Hill Wilson lives in Prairie Grove with her husband, three dogs and two cats. She has been practicing meditation with Bhante Sujatha for almost five years. She majored in English/Journalism at Elmhurst College and enjoys reading, knitting, cooking and working with her husband in their home renovations company.

Buddhist Joke

Dukkha, Anicca and Anatta walk into a bar.

Dukkha says, “Life sucks!”

Anicca says, “This will pass!”

Anatta says, “You talkin’ to ME?!”



ARTIST: TOD NIELSON

“Amitayus—the Buddha of Infinite Life.” A work in progress. The colors have been reversed to reveal the underlying grid.

Medium: Pencil on cold press paper.

Tod Nielsen has been a lay practitioner since the late 1980s. He studied the Dharma under Geshe Dakpa at Tse Chen Ling Center in San Francisco and thangka painting under Ang Tsherin Sherpa in Oakland. He is now retired and lives in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin.