

Three Jewels



QUARTERLY: MAY—JULY 2011
WWW.BLUELOTUSTEMPLE.ORG

THE NEWSLETTER OF BLUE LOTUS BUDDHIST TEMPLE

REVISIT OUR 8TH ANNUAL

Taste of Sri Lanka

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

A Message from the President
Karuna in the Community—**NEW**
Bhante Sujatha's Travels
And More!



Three Jewels

MAY-JULY 2011

- 1 MESSAGE FROM THE ABBOT
- 3 FROM THE EDITOR
- 4 MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT
- 5 KARUNA IN THE COMMUNITY
- 9 LATEST NEWS
- 19 FROM OUR SANGHA
- 30 ART FROM THE COMMUNITY

SEND US YOUR THOUGHTS, ANNOUNCEMENTS, ARTICLES & ART!
DEADLINE FOR THE FALL ISSUE IS JUNE 30, 2011.

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

Email: mail@bluelotustemple.org

ABBOT

Bhante Sujatha Peradeniye

EDITOR

John Stanley

media@bluelotustemple.org

GRAPHIC DESIGNER

Bibi Dowell

design@bluelotustemple.org

ORDAINED SANGHA

CHICAGOLAND, IL & SOUTHERN WISCONSIN

Bhante Sanyatha

Bhante Samita

Bhikkuni Vimala

Bhante Sumana

PEORIA, IL

Bhante Rahula

PRESIDENT

Glen Ebey

VICE PRESIDENT

Guy Spinelli

SECRETARY

Nancy Schwab

TREASURER

Bill Reddy

DIRECTORS

Brian Waspi, Kristin Hannah, Julie Gibson

Greetings with Loving-kindness



Photo by David Schmidt

I am delighted you have shown an interest in meditation practice and have chosen to visit us. If you are seeking inner peace in this busy and stressful society, meditation practice and the Buddha's wisdom are a place where all can attain it. I believe the Buddha's teachings and the practice of meditation are relevant to and essential for the well-being of humanity in modern times. I am committed to serving as a bridge between East and West so that the Buddha's teachings of kindness, compassion, joyfulness, and equanimity might be integrated into our lives. Everyone, regardless of ethnic or religious background, can learn the techniques to cultivate inner-peace, wisdom, and clearly understand the true nature of all things.

Welcome to Blue Lotus Temple. May you be well, happy, and peaceful!

—*Bhante Sujatha*

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.



In the last issue, I wrote a little about the many winter solstice festivals of light, including *Bodhi Day*, and concluded that we need symbols of light to get us through the dark winter. Now as we approach May, spring is here and the light has returned!

As the days grow longer and the flowers bloom, my mind turns to our backyard garden and the hope that we can grow some of our own produce, not only saving a little bit of money but eating the most fresh and nutritional organic fruits and vegetables. In reality, I tend to grow some large plants, but they don't always produce the best fruit. It's at this time that I turn to the farmers' market to buy from the experts.

Buying produce from farmers' markets has many benefits. First is the issue of buying the freshest produce. Because supermarkets need such a steady and large supply of fruits and vegetables, they often buy from large corporate farms rather than a small local farmer. The produce can be coming from far across the country or even the world. For these reasons, even *Whole Foods*, the Mecca of organic food, will often purchase its fruits and vegetables from far-away distances to fill its large demands. Produce that travels long distances is often picked green and loses nutritional value as it ages in transport. Second, there is the carbon footprint from transporting food such long distances. Third, it comes at the expense of local farms

whose taxes support our own communities.

Not all farm stands are created equal. Some farms are organic-only, some are mostly conventional (think pesticide residue and chemical fertilizers that pollute our water), and some are using organic techniques but can't afford the *USDA Organic* certification.

Last summer, I decided to ask around at my local farmer's market in Wauconda and found that the largest stand was using conventional growing methods; the woman I asked even seemed annoyed that I was looking for organic produce. But just down the row, a small farm stand run by a couple from Harvard had mostly organic produce, and they were happy to talk about it. It turns out that getting certified organic can be a true hardship for a small farmer, so ask around and you're sure to find organically grown produce.

As Buddhists, we talk a lot about the alleviation of suffering, and sadly, the way food is grown and the way animals are raised and slaughtered can cause a lot of suffering for the natural environment and animals. Of course, vegetarians will most likely say to stop eating meat, but if you are an omnivore, I believe we should be mindful about where our meat comes from and how the animals are raised and slaughtered.

Thanks to movies like *Food Inc.* and books like *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, more and more Americans are becoming enlightened

Purchasing organic food from the farmers' markets has many benefits for our local farmers, our health, and alleviates suffering of nature and food-animals.



about the food industry. You may have even heard a new food-related label: *ethical omnivore*. An ethical omnivore cares about what a food-animal eats, what kind of living conditions it has, and how it is slaughtered and processed. For instance, grass-fed beef is growing in popularity as we learn that cows are not meant to eat corn. We are awakening to the way factory farms fatten up cows for the slaughter by keeping them in giant feed lots for months. While often standing in their own excrement, cows are fed a diet of corn and antibiotics, the latter is needed to protect them from the unhealthy conditions of eating a non-natural food (for them) and being packed into a small space with so many other animals. Then there is the concern that eating animals that have been given antibiotics will cause an antibiotic-resistance in us.

There is a better way, and we can often find it locally. My family has started buying meat from Nick Wallace (wallacefarms.com), a rancher in Iowa who has a local buying club in Wauconda. He sells grass-fed beef, pastured chickens and turkeys that roam outside, “fresh air” pork from pigs that are free to forage outdoors, and wild fish from the West coast. If you go to Blue Lotus’ Woodstock, IL location, you can talk to Michelle from Willow Lea Stock Farm (willowlea.com), who raises and sells grass-fed local beef every Saturday at the Woodstock Farmers’ Market, and you can buy pastured poultry, eggs, and pork from R Family Farm out of Poplar Grove (r-family-farm.com).

Purchasing organic food from the farmers’ markets has many benefits for our local farmers, our health, and alleviates suffering of nature and food-animals. Oh yeah, it tastes great too. As Ben and Jerry say about their ice cream, “it’s more expensive and it’s worth it!” 🍷

—John Stanley

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



Igo for refuge in the Sangha, the spiritual community; I commit myself to living the enlightened life. Most of us are familiar with the Three Jewels—the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. The Refuge Prayer, where we seek refuge in the Three Jewels, is the basic commitment we make when we first embark on our spiritual journey. We reaffirm this commitment every week in our chanting at the end of the Dharma talk. But what does seeking refuge in the Sangha really mean and why is it important?

Historically, the Sangha referred to the community of ordained monks and nuns. More recently, however, it has come to represent the entire community of those on the path to peace, happiness, and awareness. We take refuge in the Sangha when we come together each week for loving kindness meditation.

Meditating as a group creates a higher level of spiritual energy and togetherness that is an important part of our practice. You can feel the increased sense of happiness when in the company of people who share a common thread. To quote Lama Surya Das from his book *Awakening the Buddha Within*, “Taking refuge in the Sangha represents our commitment to living harmoniously with others and working to bring all sentient beings further along the path to enlightenment.” So, taking refuge in the Sangha is not just a social gathering of individuals at temple each week, it is an important part of our spiritual growth as well.

In January of this year, Blue Lotus Buddhist Temple celebrated its ninth anniversary. Our Sangha has grown considerably in the last few years, and as we enter our tenth year together, I am happy to be a part of our growing, caring family. I know all of you share my enthusiasm as well. May we all be well, happy, and peaceful throughout the coming year!

A WORD FROM THE TEMPLE BOARD

Spring is a busy time for Blue Lotus as two of our largest events take place: the *Taste of Sri Lanka* and Visakha Day.

The eighth-annual *Taste* was held on Saturday, March 26th at the Unitarian Universalist Church in Woodstock. It was a fun evening of good food, good entertainment, and—as always—a lively auction.

The Taste of Sri Lanka is our main fundraising event of the year and I am happy to report we made almost \$4,630 after expenses. The Temple Board would like to thank the members of our Sri Lankan community for donating and preparing the food, the over fifty individuals who donated items for the auction, and everyone involved with making the event a huge success.

Coming up on May 28th, we have Visakha Day (Buddha Day). There will be chanting by a group of twenty monks and nuns, a lantern procession around the Woodstock Square, and a social gathering afterwards. Please plan to join us in celebrating the Buddha's birth, enlightenment, and passage to Nirvana on this universally celebrated Buddhist holy day. ♥

—Glen Ebey



KARUNA is often translated as compassion, and is associated with seeing other beings suffer. Karuna often accompanies metta (loving kindness), according to the Pali commentaries: “Karuna is the desire to remove harm and suffering from others; while metta is the desire to bring about the well-being and happiness of others.”

We often feel the need to do something when we see someone suffering. Sometimes we wonder if big acts are the only ones that can help, but small everyday acts are very important, just as drops of water in time will fill a jar.

“The doer of good rejoices here and hereafter; he rejoices in both the worlds. He rejoices and exults, recollecting his own pure deeds.” –Dhp. 16

“Should a person do good, let him do it again and again. Let him find pleasure therein, for blissful is the accumulation of good” –Dhp. 118

“He keeps pervading the first direction—as well as the second direction, the third, and the fourth—with an awareness imbued with compassion. Thus he keeps pervading above, below, and all around, everywhere and in every respect the all-encompassing cosmos with an awareness imbued with compassion: abundant, expansive, immeasurable, free from hostility, free from ill will.” –Kalama Sutta (AN 3.65)

Many of us in the Blue Lotus Temple community practice compassion with other organizations/groups and at other venues, so we ask that you **share the charity events that you plan to attend or would like to help** in case others would be interested in participating. We will then share this list with the Blue Lotus Temple community. Please email Norm Carpenter (bluelotusnews@gmail.com) for more information.

Thanks to Norm Carpenter for starting this worthy project.

Women: Potential Bearers of Future Buddhas

As Bhante Sujatha is preparing for his annual trip to Sri Lanka, he is also planning his second charitable hospital project targeted towards mothers and babies. One maternity ward in Sri Lanka has forty-five beds but is very low on necessities and needs an incubator. This year, Bhante is hoping to be able to donate an incubator for the babies; it will cost over \$3000.

The maternity ward project is one that is near and dear to Bhante Sujatha's heart. He feels that women, especially, are vulnerable during these difficult times—and yet, they carry so many burdens. There is so much danger for those who bring life into the world, which is why Bhante feels this cause to be so important. Every woman is special; each mother shares something in common with the Buddha's mother. All mothers could be bringing little Buddhas into the world.

If you are interested in making a donation towards the maternity ward in Sri Lanka, please mail a check to

Blue Lotus Temple 520 Devonshire Ln #8 Crystal Lake, IL 60014
In the *memo*, please write Hospital Project in Sri Lanka. **Donations must be received by the end of May.**



Clothing Donations Needed

Hello fellow Blue Lotus Temple members and friends. I am reaching out and asking for some help from anyone who can. I volunteer for McHenry county VOICE Sexual Assault services located in Woodstock, only one block from where we meditate.

One of the things I do as a volunteer is to go to the nearby hospitals when a victim is brought to the Emergency Department. We are there to let the victim know that they are not alone and that there are people to help and guide them step by step from medical through legal advocacy. Often times, we are present when the evidence kit (rape kit) is performed and the police confiscate the victim's clothing. We like to provide new, tagged clothing to the victims so that they don't have to go home in a gown or scrubs, furthering their feeling of loss of dignity.

Our agency normally purchases and provides this clothing; however, with the cuts in funding by the state, the financial burden is being felt throughout the organization.

I am collecting donations of clothing or money to purchase clothing to give the victims after their own clothing is confiscated for evidence in the E.R.



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

Monetary donations accepted also, as I will then go and purchase the clothing. ♥

—Candy Cotsiomititis

Please email me at: candy@foralltheunheardsouls.com to arrange a pick-up

For more information on the services that VOICE offers, please visit <http://www.pioneercenter.org/newVoice/default.asp>

Visit my website at <http://www.foralltheunheardsouls.com>

Blue Lotus Temple can earn a donation every time you search the Internet and shop online!

GoodSearch & GoodShop



Search the web with Yahoo-powered **GoodSearch.com** and they'll donate about a penny to Blue Lotus each time you search!

Shop at more than 1,300 **GoodShop.com** merchants including Amazon, Best Buy, Toys R Us, and others, and a percentage of each purchase will go to your cause!

FEATURED IN

The New York Times

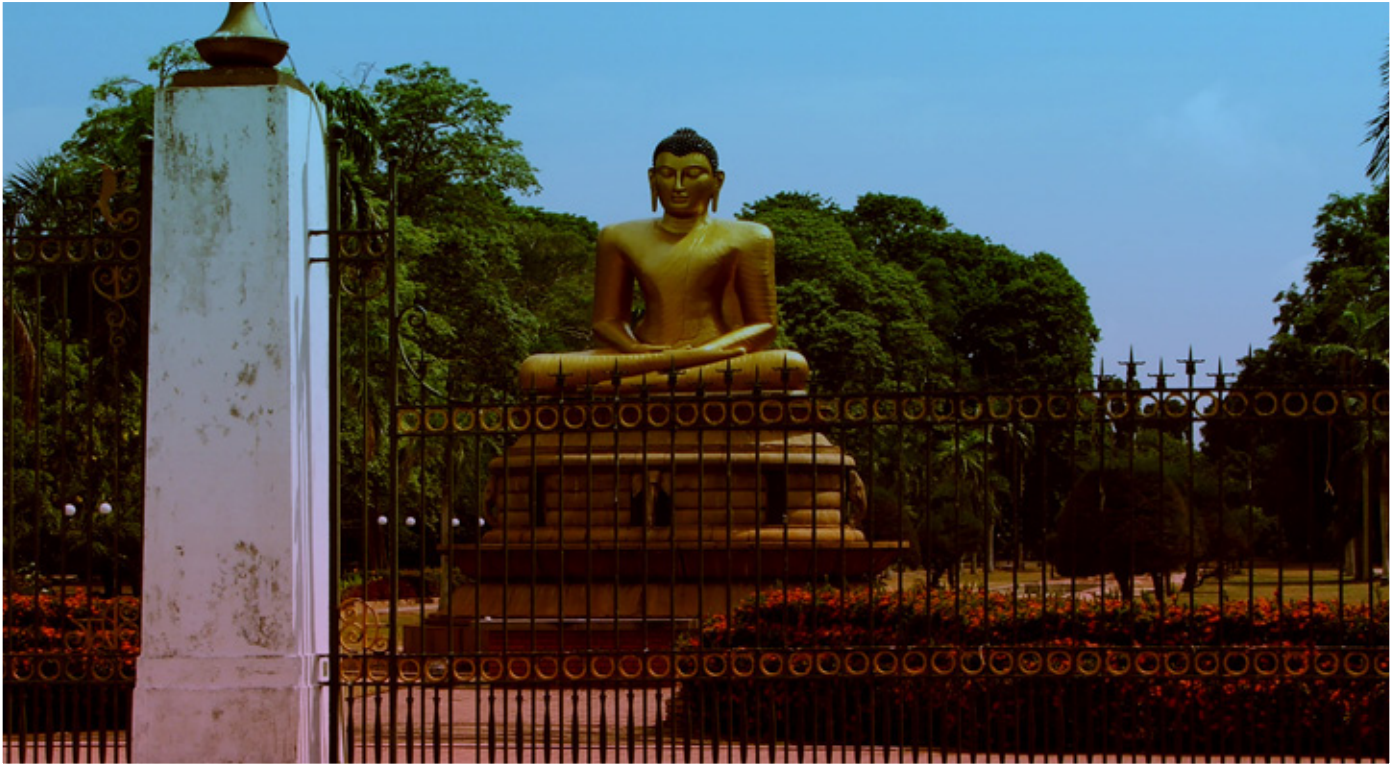
abc NEWS

O, THE OPRAH MAGAZINE

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

FORTUNE
SMALL BUSINESS

Dinner with the Buddha



BY AMANDA GARCIA

The Blue Lotus Buddhist Temple held its 8th annual *Taste of Sri Lanka* fundraising dinner on Saturday evening, March 26th, 2011 at the Unitarian Church in Woodstock, Illinois. The fundraiser includes a full dinner buffet of Sri Lankan cuisine, live musical performances, and a live auction.

“This is our biggest fundraiser of the year,” said Bill Reddy, Treasurer of the Blue Lotus Temple. In 2010, the temple earned approximately \$4,500 from the Taste of Sri Lanka. “We should earn about the same this year,” said Bill, “and all of that goes toward the Building Fund.”

Tickets for the eighty-seat dinner buffet sold out and additional attendees arrived later in the evening for the live auction. Dinner guests were greeted at the door by the gracious Blue Lotus Temple monks before being welcomed into the dining room. Tables draped in white, gold, and red tablecloths with candlelit centerpieces filled the entire dining area. Photos and travel posters of lush Sri Lankan landscapes and mist-shrouded mountaintops adorned the walls to more fully transport guests to the island nation.

Once seated, attendees viewed a documentary on the history and culture of Sri Lanka. Dinner guests learned that Sri Lanka has a population of over 21 million people and is the oldest democracy in the Asian subcontinent. In 2010, the *New York Times* named Sri Lanka one of the Top 10 tourist destinations in the world, in large part due to the miles of secluded beaches and the extensive national parks where elephants and leopards roam free.

Before being unleashed on the dinner buffet, guests were treated to a story about a Sri Lankan king and his new queen who sat down for their first dinner together at their wedding celebration. The queen, who was from a far away land—the West, perhaps—picked at her food with a fork and did not eat her meal in the Sri Lankan way. The king explained to Her Majesty that a Sri Lankan meal is traditionally eaten using the fingers in place of a fork. Rice, the foundation of most Sri Lanka cuisine, is mixed with other foods on the plate using the fingertips. After mixing the right proportions of each flavor and food with the rice, the blended portion of the food is pressed into a small patty or ball and is then eaten by hand.

The generous buffet, prepared by ten Sri Lankan women, included three styles of rice, including yellow saffron rice, which was especially popular with dinner guests. Other dishes included spicy fried potatoes, lentils, curried eggplant, soy curry with cashews, pol sambol (a shredded coconut and onion mixture) and savory jackfruit. Jackfruit, a fruit native to Southeast Asia, has a fleshy texture remarkably similar to meat. After a hearty vegetarian dinner, guests found room for the items in the dessert buffet, including mango mousse, fresh fruit, coconut custard, and cashew cookies.

Resting comfortably in their after dinner glow, guests were treated to live musical performances by members of the Blue Lotus Temple. Julie Gibson played acoustic guitar and sang a blessing song written as a gift for Bhante Sujatha by a meditation practitioner in Northern Michigan.

Tricia Alexander performed several

songs, including *Penny's From Heaven*, which she claimed “hit her upside the head” earlier in the day, meaning someone at the event must have needed to hear that particular song. Cheryl Nemo and the Orphans gave a rich performance of folk music including songs by Woodie Guthrie and The Blue Sky Boys.

The evening wrapped up with a spirited live auction of items donated from the community. Auction items included a one-month membership



Bhante Sanyatha



Some of the talented food preparers

to Health Bridge fitness club, Bhante Sujatha's favorite meditation bell and incense burner (which he donated because he felt too attached to the items), yoga classes, statues of Buddha, Sri Lankan wall hangings, a two night stay at the Golden Oaks B&B in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, Sri Lankan saris, items from Peter Patterson Glassworks, a Balance Box from Energy Infusion and many other items collected from the generous members of the Blue Lotus Temple community. ❁



Tricia Alexander

Event photos by David Schmidt

2011 1st Quarter Financials

Financial Assets as of 04/01/2011: \$57,644.69

INCOME

Total Net Income: \$9,204.68

Pledges: \$2,055.00

Cafepress.com Online Store: \$29.64

Goodsearch: \$29.64

Tunecore (CD Sales): \$35.00

EXPENSES

Land Loan Balance as of 3/10/2010: \$51,539.22

Land Loan Payment: \$497.50/month

Rent to Unitarian Church: \$840.00

Advertisement

ANYONE
can go to **HEAVEN**
just **BE GOOD!**

www.justbegood.net

Free books, talks, mp3 audio, decals, bookmarks, and much more! Highly recommended.

Wisdom Comes to Penn State

Friday, February 18th was a special day for students at Penn State-Mont Alto, as the Buddhist monk, Bhante Sujatha, visited their campus. Let me set the scene for you:

As one who has taught philosophy to college students for more than thirty years, I think the current generation of students is more often than not characterized unfairly. Frequently described as “thoughtless,” “lazy,” and “uncritical,” my own experience is strikingly different. The current group of students is the least materialistic I have experienced. Also, they have also been more extensively marketed to, deceived, and lied to than any generation in living memory. In addition, all of them are products of “don’t-think-just-memorize” schooling that places unreasoning obedience above fair-minded critical intelligence, and most of them (at least in my area) were raised in right-wing fundamentalist churches that emphasize the fearfulness of life and the corruption of their own natures.

Understandably confused and wary, they are nevertheless more open and more willing to listen than previous generations. In my classes I talk about many deep and important things, especially my “Asian philosophy” classes, which are quite popular. But at the end of the day it is only talk—nice ideas, interesting observations, and pleasant ideals. By analogy, you could say this talk offers to them the blueprint for a wonderful house-to-be-built, the house of happiness.

Of course, Bhante has inspiring blueprints for that house, but that was not the source of his impact on my campus. It was his being. With Bhante, the students were able to experience for themselves what these ideas and practices look like in the living flesh. His being is the living demonstration of what all of this talking, reading, meditating, and practicing is about. They could see the house, not just the blueprint.

I received quite a few notes of appreciation from students in the days after Bhante’s visit. I would like to quote from a typical one.

A student expressed how deeply moved and inspired she was by this “visiting monk” who “was extremely humble and down-to-earth and had a great sense of humor.” She commented that even though “he had a great aura and strong sense of spirituality, he didn’t make you feel uncomfortable or lead you to feel bad about yourself.” She was especially struck by Bhante’s teaching that “Buddhism is like water in that it doesn’t have a shape.”

She deeply appreciated his emphasis on “living in the moment,” and said his statement that “happiness is at the tip of your nose, just breathe it in” changed her life. She said that reading texts and discussing ideas in class was not inspiring her, but Bhante’s visit helped her to see. As she put it, “seeing Bhante helped me to appreciate the teachings in a whole new light.”

On behalf of many thankful and newly inspired students, I want to say, “Thank you, Bhante.”

—Dr. John Bardi, Penn State-Mont Alto



Bhante Sujatha Speaks at Dickinson College

Over 100 people from the campus of Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, and the surrounding community came to hear Bhante Sujatha on Thursday, February 17th. The setting was Memorial Hall in Dickinson’s historic Old West building. Some of the attendees were merely curious about meeting a Buddhist monk, but others came because they were thirsty for Dhamma, and Dhamma teachers are hard to find in central Pennsylvania.

Bhante first led the assembled group in a guided meditation on loving-kindness. He then characteristically began to speak without notes, from the heart, talking about the real nature of meditation. He wove in some of his own recent experiences and answered questions from the audience.

It was evident that people were genuinely excited by Bhante’s message and personality. We’re looking forward to the next time.

—Dan Cozort
Associate Professor of Religion at
Dickinson College in Carlisle



Custom Blue Lotus Blown Glass by Local Artist, Peter Patterson
If you were at the Taste of Sri Lanka auction, you probably saw the custom Blue Lotus glass pieces donated by Peter Patterson of Mundelein, Illinois. Now Peter can make you a custom glass piece with a Buddha or a Blue Lotus Temple logo

To order your own one-of-a-kind piece of glass art, email Peter at

ppglass@earthlink.net

or call (847) 949-0013

Patterson Glassworks

888 Tower Road, Unit E

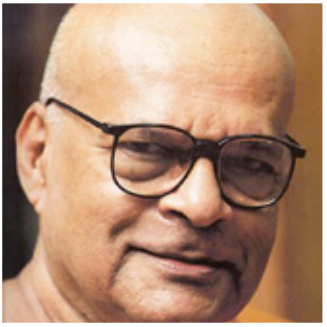
Mundelein, IL 60060

pattersonglass.com



Celebration of Wesak

by Ven. Dr K Sri Dhammananda



The best known date on the Buddhist calendar, familiar even to non-Buddhists, is the thrice sacred day of “Wesak” [or Vesakha]. Wesak is the name of a month in the ancient Indian calendar and it usually falls in May though sometimes it may commence in the later part of April or extend to the early part of June. Wesak is derived from the original Pali word “Wesakha” or Sanskrit “Waishakha”. In some countries it is also known simply as Buddha Day.

A THRICE SACRED DAY

Hence on Wesak Day, Buddhists all over the world commemorate three great events: The Birth, Enlightenment and the Passing Away of Gautama Buddha. As Buddhism spread from India to all parts of the world, the teachings were readily assimilated with the cultures of the people who accepted the teachings. As a result, Buddhist art and culture took on a rich variety of forms with profound gentleness and kindness as the Buddha expressly forbade the use of force. The practice of Buddhism was adapted in many ways to suit the nature of the various cultures that accepted it.

As a result of this, Wesak is celebrated in many different ways all over the world. But in essence many practices have become universal. It is most important to remember that this sacred day is purely and simply a religious festival and not a festive occasion for feasting, drinking and dancing. On this day all Buddhists are expected to reaffirm their faith in the Buddha Dhamma and to lead a noble religious life. It is a day for meditation and for radiating Loving-Kindness.

HOW TO CELEBRATE WESAK

Devotees may bring simple offerings of flowers, candles and joss-sticks to lay at the feet of their great teacher. These symbolic offerings are to remind us that just as the beautiful flowers would wither away after a short while and the candles and joss-sticks would soon burn out, life is subject to decay and destruction in similar manner as the flowers, candles and joss-sticks. Devotees are enjoined to make a special effort to refrain from killing of any kind. They are encouraged to partake of vegetarian food for the day. In some countries, notably SRI LANKA, two days are set aside for the celebration of Wesak and all liquor shops and slaughter houses are closed by government decree during the two days. Birds and animals are also released by the thousands in a symbolic act to liberation, of giving freedom

to those who are in captivity. Some devout Buddhists will wear simple white dress and spend the whole day in temples with renewed determination to observe the observance of the Eight Precepts.

Devotees are expected to listen to talks given by monks. On this day monks will recite verses uttered by the Buddha twenty-five centuries ago, to invoke peace and happiness for the Government and the people. Buddhists are reminded to live in harmony with people of other faiths and to respect the beliefs of other people as the Buddha had taught.

BRINGING HAPPINESS TO OTHERS

Celebrating Wesak also means making special efforts to bring happiness to the unfortunate like the aged, the handicapped and the sick. To this end, Buddhists will distribute gifts in cash and kind to various charitable homes throughout the country. Wesak is also a time for great joy and happiness. But this joy is expressed not by pandering to one's appetites but by concentrating on useful activities such as decorating and illuminating temples, painting and creating exquisite scenes from the life of the Buddha for public dissemination. Devout Buddhists also vie with one

another to provide refreshments and vegetarian food to devotees who visit the temple to pay homage to the Blessed One.

PROPER WAY TO PAY HOMAGE TO THE BUDDHA

The Buddha Himself has given invaluable advice on how to pay homage to Him. Just before He passed away, He saw His faithful attendant Ananda, weeping. The Buddha advised him not to weep, but to understand the universal law that all compounded things (including even His own body) must disintegrate. He advised everyone not to cry over the disintegration of the physical body but to regard His teachings (The Dhamma) as their Teacher from then on, because only the Dhamma TRUTH is eternal and not subject to the law of change. He also stressed that the way to pay homage to Him was not merely by offering flowers, incense, and lights, but by truly and sincerely striving to follow His teachings.

This is how we should celebrate Wesak: use this opportunity to reiterate our determination to lead noble lives, to develop our mind, to practise loving-kindness and to bring peace and harmony to mankind. ❖

*May Wesak The Thrice Sacred Day Bring Peace
And Happiness To Each And Everyone.*



Photo by John Stanley

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 media@bluelotustemple.org 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.



ARE BUDDHISTS IN FAVOR OF BIRTH CONTROL?

Bhante: Buddhism is not against contraception. A couple should provide conditions for a birth only if they are willing to welcome a new baby. Not providing conditions for a birth is not considered sin or bad in Buddhism. Birth control is accepted in Buddhism as long as we do not do killing of embryos. It should be noted, however, that abortion is considered a killing of a living being in Buddhism.

WHAT DO BUDDHISTS BELIEVE HAPPENS TO NON-BUDDHISTS WHEN THEY DIE? ARE THEY DOOMED TO EVERLASTING HELL-FIRE, OR DOES BUDDHA SEND THEM BACK AS WORMS?

Whether one is a Buddhist or a non-Buddhist, his or her consciousness will get reestablished in a fertilized egg or in other place after his or her death. The kamma, the overall moral quality of our living, will decide the appropriate place for the consciousness to get reestablished. The moral quality of our living is not decided by being or not being a Buddhist, but by underlying mental states of our activities. Being a Buddhist can be helpful in understanding this process and to skillfully manage one’s life. But what matters after death is the overall moral quality of our life since that moral quality fashions our consciousness. This is a natural process and it applies equally to both Buddhists and non-Buddhists. We will be able to transcend this process of rebirth when we transcend the self-centeredness, which is the enlightenment.

WHAT IS THE BUDDHIST POSITION ON ORGAN TRANSPLANTS?

Organ transplants are a great opportunity for a person to prolong his or her precious life as a human. It is also great opportunity for one to practice Dana by offering his or her organ for the benefit of someone else. In traditional Buddhist countries, organ transplant is widely practiced. We can find many volunteers, particularly monks, who would like donate their organs.

ON CLONING?

Cloning will produce similar looking beings in physical appearance. But they will have their own minds and eventually they will develop their own personality. Buddhism has no problem with cloning.

ON IN VITRO FERTILIZATION?

In the Buddhist view, a consciousness should affect a fetus to grow into an embryo. Without an influence of a consciousness, it will not grow. Providing appropriate physical conditions for an embryo to grow is completely alright. Whether it is within the mother’s womb or in an artificial environment does not matter.

ON PUTTING DOWN A SUFFERING ANIMAL?

We have no right to decide to terminate life of a being based on our judgment. The best option would be to let the natural process take place without adding our judgments to it. ❀

Advertisement



creative

We specialize in design for both print and online marketing materials.

development

We build beautiful websites using modern technology and current standards.

contact us for a complimentary chat!

82birds.com | hello@82birds.com | 815.315.0416

The Three Jewels newsletter as well as www.bluelotustemple.org is designed, developed and maintained as a donation to the community by 82 Birds.

Being a Buddha Girl

by Elizabeth Schmidt

Hi! My name is Elizabeth. I am an eleven-year-old Buddhist kid. I like to do many fun things like sports and learn new things and hang out with my closest friends! I would like to encourage you all to learn about Buddhism. When I grow up, I would like to be a writer or an illustrator because I like to draw! Thank you so much for reading my story. I hope you like it!

Namaste, Elizabeth



It is more important to give rather than to receive; it gives me great joy. Even giving love is giving in my practice. I practice loving-kindness and compassion; this can change the world. This is how my story starts:

My name is Elizabeth Anne Schmidt. I am a practicing Buddhist as well as a baptized Christian. The current temple I belong to is the Blue Lotus Temple located in Woodstock, Illinois. I am very proud to be a Buddhist. My Buddhist practice teaches me loving-kindness and compassion. Loving-kindness teaches me to be kind, even to the people who are mean to me and sometimes hurt me. They need loving-kindness the most. My practice teaches me to meditate. In my meditation, I pray for my family, people I love, and even the people I don't love so much.

It is most important for me to include everyone I can so that I can send them love. Loving-kindness teaches me that it starts with me first. If I love myself, I can give

more love to others. This gives me great joy. I believe with loving-kindness, I can begin to change the world. It starts with me and my teachers. My teachers' names are Bhante Sujatha, Bhante Sanyatha, and Bhante Samita. They are all from Sri Lanka. They are all Buddhist monks. When I have a question, they answer it for me.

The monks are trying to build a temple (church) and they rely on donations. Right now there are not enough donations to build a new temple. If you would meet the monks, you would realize how much our community needs them. They are very humble and ask for nothing in return. My dad, mom, and I are trying to think of ways to make money for the temple. We help in any way we can.

I try to help when there are events at the church. I am open to any suggestions to help me raise money!

May you be well, happy, and peaceful. ♥

I've Looked at Life from Both Sides Now

by Pam Larson



If you are old enough to remember the Joni Mitchell song, *Both Sides Now*, then you may remember that it's about the different sides of life and how we really never figure it out. Life and love are only illusions when we wrap it all up in expectations.

The past few weeks have been full of change for me and most of it has been very positive. But, the big news is the way that I have been able to look at things. I thank the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha for this change.

I have felt so much joy and love in my life since I chose this path to inner peace. I marvel every day at the calmness in my mind, the wisdom in my thoughts and actions, and the love in my heart.

I just returned from a trip down south to visit my family. It is the first time I have been back since last April, when my brother died from cancer. I was so scared, even before I left. I had to visit the cemetery, drive by where he lived, do all the things we do when we are all together, but minus him and his fiancée who also passed away from cancer very recently.

So I faced each and every situation with (mostly) calmness and peace. I went to the cemetery four times. I knew my brother wasn't there, but it is a place where we honor Paul's memory, as well as Gina's. After

several visits, I felt that I could let go and accept. No matter where I go, he is in my heart, so I don't have to be near the cemetery to feel close to him. I was so surprised and thankful that I was able to walk away from there with peace in my heart.

We also purchased our land that we will be building on for retirement in two to three years. It is a beautiful 15 acres of my sister-in-law's family land, of which we purchased five acres, near our families and with many possibilities. I have already planned a pond, a gazebo, and a special small building for meditation and study. I hope to have Bhante Sujatha visit someday for a workshop or a retreat. Of course, we know that things like that may or may not happen. It will be a blessing if it does.

I am not a perfect human being by any means. But, I will tell you that I am a much better human being and a much wiser human being than I was two years ago. All I had to do was listen, meditate, and be patient. The calmness, love, and wisdom will come. Practicing loving kindness every day brings it all together. That is the key.

We may never figure out the *meaning* of life, but really, loving kindness is what it's all about. Looking at life from *both sides now* has given me that wisdom. ❖

Yet Another Look at that Curious Thing Called Mindfulness

by Jim Kail



“Hey, Dad! Would you watch this movie with me and my friends?!” This question from my teenage daughter shocked me since her attitude had always been the less contact with the “Ps” the better. I said, “Sure!” jumping at this unusual and welcome opportunity. But I was also curious and asked her why she asked me. She replied that they had rented a comedy and my laughter made the movie funnier. So we watched the movie and I was happy to help supply the laugh track.

This is an example that shows how interconnected we are with our fellow humans. When we see them smile or laugh, we feel happy. When we see them angry or sad, we become upset too. Neuroscientists at UCLA discovered specialized cells in our brains, mirror neurons, which activate in order to mimic emotions from others (see *Mirroring People* by Marco Iacoboni). This is a powerful ability to increase social cooperation, which is why our species is so successful. This ability to tune in to others, even to the point of feeling what they feel is the reason why we feel empathy and compassion. It’s the reason that we prefer not to be dragged into other people’s drama.

This leads me to the conclusion that just being aware from moment to moment is not enough. I think enhancing this awareness with knowledge is better. For example, when we see anger arising in ourselves, we add to this awareness our scientific knowledge of the brain and how our emotions affect others. We also add to this awareness our Buddhist knowledge of loving-kindness, impermanence, and focused self-observation. Simple awareness is not enough. A dog is aware. I’m not saying that when we are aware in the moment that we need to remember a long list of Buddhist and scientific teachings. Rather, when we practice and know these teachings so well that they are second nature to us, our attitudes change. Our simple awareness is transformed to mindfulness. ❁

Movie Review: *A Return to Buddhism*

The Burmese Harp (Biruma no Tategoto), Japan, 1956

by *Tod Nielsen*

The Burmese Harp is director Kon Ichikawa’s attempt to heal the wounds resulting from Japan’s disastrous initiation of war and subsequent defeat in the Pacific Theater of World War II. But it’s also a forceful message about the power of intentions and the possibility of redemption.

A quick lesson in Japanese history here: The Meiji Restoration of 1868 led to the imposition of an Imperial political system modeled after that of Prussia. Buddhism and Shintoism were forcibly separated, and Buddhism was suppressed in favor of the “native” religion, Shinto, which emphasized the divinity of the Emperor, a strong military, and extreme nationalism.

The movie starts in the closing days of World War II. The Imperial Japanese Army has surrendered, but the news hasn’t reached some troops still fighting in Burma. One unwarlike company, whose main mission seems to be to wander about and sing their way through the war, is led by Captain Inouye. One of the soldiers is Private Mizushima, who has taught himself to play the Burmese harp—and, in fact, he can pass as a native. In an unlikely but beautiful scene, music is the medium by which Inouye’s company surrenders to the British forces.

The British send Private Mizushima to Triangle Mountain to convince a fanatical company of Japanese holdouts to surrender. But their commander refuses, preferring an “honorable death” to capture, so the British blast the holdout’s redoubt apart. Only Mizushima escapes—barely alive.

Mizushima is saved and nursed back to health by a solitary Buddhist monk. He tells Mizushima, “The British and Japanese may fight over Burma, but Burma is the Buddha’s country.” When he has recovered, Mizushima is still thinking like a soldier. He has no compunctions when he steals the monk’s robes and heads south to join his company at the POW camp in Mudon. Along the way, he has some revelations. The first is that the Burmese, believing him to be a true monk, treat him with great kindness and respect. Another is that he sees unburied Japanese soldiers everywhere. When he finally gets to Mudon, he stops at a

monastery before going to the POW camp. While there, he sees the British hospital staff burying a Japanese POW with great respect and solemnity. He decides that he can do no less, and returns north to bury as many soldiers as he can.

In a very touching scene, Mizushima is seen crossing a bridge going north while his old company and Captain Inouye are passing south, returning from a work detail to the POW camp. Mizushima turns his back on his old comrades and refuses to acknowledge them. Is it because he is unsure of his resolve? Or has he turned his back on soldiering and war?



In the end, Mizushima returns to the POW camp and shows himself to his erstwhile comrades. They beg him to return to Japan with them, but all he does is play a farewell song on his harp, before turning and disappearing into the mist.

We have seen the transformation of an unthinking cog in a war machine into an agent of compassion. The path we must follow and the actions we must take are always before us. We need only the wisdom to see and the courage to act. The last scene shows Mizushima—now a true monk—marching off into the vast plains of Burma, striving to fulfill his mission.

Highly recommended! ♡

How I Discovered the Blue Lotus Temple

by Derek Meier

There is a long version and a short version of this story so I'll try to keep it short but meaningful.

In early January I attended the *Semester at Sea* reunion voyage from Nassau, Bahamas to San Juan, Puerto Rico. I was with my brother and my two good friends. This trip was an unexpected vacation and required that I spend money with which I wasn't eager to part. But my friends quickly convinced me that this would be a fantastic networking opportunity and a good place to meet with people from across the country who are involved in different fields of work.

My secret wish before the trip was that I would meet a billionaire with a beautiful daughter who would hire me to be his right-hand man in some global enterprise he led, and after working for him and building a relationship with his family I would become part of the family and live happily ever after on a Hawaiian sea-side ranch. Well, that and walk away from the vacation with a relaxed attitude and very tan flesh.

The result as you'll find out is even better.

My focus for the past several months has been to more fully realize my life's purpose and to take action in that direction so that I can be proud of how I'm living and reach a point where my life's work becomes fused with my life's journey in such a way that I am driven and pulled to do the work that feels like living more than working. Rather than live a split life with Monday through Friday as one part of me and Saturday and Sunday as another part, I want to live seven days a week fulfilling my life's meaningful purpose through living and working to better myself and to uplift those around me.

On the cruise ship one of the first things I

did was to read through the daily itinerary. The first thing I saw that caught my eye was a meditation that Bhante would be leading the next morning at 8 a.m. Meditation on discovering your life's purpose!

Here it was, and here I am! I was excited to attend. But my plan to attend was diverted by dancing the night before, and the fact that I am not a morning person at this phase of my life. When I woke up and looked at the clock to realize that I had missed the meditation, I was upset. I thought to myself, "How will I find my purpose now that I've missed the greatest opportunity I've had to discover it in the past year?! How could I let myself miss out on this?!"

Later in the day I was enjoying the cruise from the pool deck, collecting the sun's energy on my winter-worn body when I thought to myself, "I know what I'll do; I'll try to find Bhante on the ship and see if he has any time to talk to me." The ship is enormous with more than 8 decks and hundreds of cabins. "How on Earth will I find him?" I thought.

I stood up from the lounge chair and began walking to the door that leads to the interior of the ship, and just as I opened the door, who should walk out but Bhante himself. He smiled ear to ear, with bright eyes and a warm heart and I eagerly asked him, "Bhante, may I have some of your time to talk about what I missed this morning?" Bhante and the Universe were working with me and I was instantly aware that our meeting was destined to take place.

Bhante spent so much time answering my questions about finding my life's purpose and meditation practices. When he told me that he lived in Woodstock, IL, I was

shocked and grateful to know that, as I live in Chicago. This cruise ship was full of people from around the country and the world, how perfect that Bhante lives so close!

On our voyage I had the opportunity to witness the marriage ceremony Bhante led as Brian Waspi and Kristen Hannah were married. It was beautiful, peaceful, and surrounded with loving energy from the ocean and all those who gathered to witness their shared vows. They were married on January 8, 2011.

On the ship there was also a memorial to a woman who had been a long-time participant and contributor to the *Semester at Sea* program. During this ceremony, roses were gently tossed into the ocean and the ship did a figure-8 in the middle of the sea. This was spectacular to me. Upon the completion of the figure-8, a whale began to surface off the stern of the ship. Up and down it leapt. Everyone on deck watched as the whale leapt from the water and crashed down, sending water up into the air everywhere! It was truly a magnificent and meaningful moment to behold, as if life in the sea was sharing with us as we celebrate life on Earth.

When I returned to Chicago from the “Cruise/Networking” trip, I opened my suitcase to unpack and I had only one person’s card. It was Bhante’s Blue Lotus Temple card; a card that still rests within reach on my desk.

I e-mailed Bhante the day I returned and he wrote back with an invitation to join the mediation in Woodstock the following Saturday. I knew I had to make this appointment and could not miss this opportunity despite not being a morning person.

As I drove to Woodstock from Chicago I began to think about all the land that surrounded me. The farms that have been converted to housing developments and new communities made me begin to feel sad about how we treat the Earth. There were signs everywhere of housing for sale: “Great Financing! New Construction!” they shouted from billboards along the road.

On one sign, I noticed a plot of land for sale that contained 88.8 acres of land. I thought to myself, I wonder if that is a farmer who is selling his land because he can’t afford not to sell it. And I looked at that number 888 and saw perfection. Three is a special number to me and I was beginning to discover that the number 8 was special too. After all, I had just seen the most beautiful wedding on the 8th of January, and then the entire ship did a figure-8 in the middle of the sea.

I arrived at the meditation and immediately saw Bhante’s smile; and then I saw Bhante. The same warm, familiar face that greeted me on my search to find him on the ship was in front of me and much closer to home. That day, I truly enjoyed the meditation. I was relaxed and welcomed by so many people who are all *seekers* (my term for those who share the desire to better themselves on their life’s journey).

After the meditation I drove home; my mind very peaceful and relaxed. I passed the sign for the 88.8 acres again and thought to myself what a cool number. As I continued to drive I entered the city and a taxi cab was in front of me going very slowly with the number 888 illuminated on top. At that point I thought to myself, “Wow, I need to listen to this message.” So the only way I thought to make this number actionable was to walk down the block to the 7-11 and buy a lottery ticket for the number 888.

I purchased three evening pick-three lottery tickets, one for each 8 and I picked the number 888 three times. The cashier laughed at me and questioned my choice. I just smiled and walked home.

The next day I looked at my number and sure enough, the winning lottery number was 888. I was excited to be a lottery winner, and I was excited to win the money, but I was, and still am today, more grateful for the lesson I was given that day.

The lesson is, when I allow myself to be quiet, I train myself to meditate and be still, and I ask the universe for direction, all I need to do is be aware with my eyes, my ears, and my other senses so that I can be receptive to where I am supposed to be in this life. I am grateful for the lesson that when I am receptive to messages from the universe, the universe will grant me with direction. All I have to do is ask.

The number 8 represents infinite wisdom and life, a constant flow that is provided to all of us and all we need to do is try to go with that flow with awareness and gratitude so we can live a meaningful, purposeful life and help those around us to do the same.

I am grateful to have found Bhante and the Blue Lotus Temple in such a beautiful and exciting way and I am excited to grow in the practice of meditation.

I connected to the universe, I was quiet and mindful, and I was lead to the Blue Lotus Temple, a beautiful place with people who are on a path I hold in high regard and from whom I have so much more to learn. I am so grateful for Blue Lotus and Bhante Sujatha becoming part of my life. ♥

Arizona, with Woodstock Roots

by *Koren Ganas*

I grew up in Woodstock, spending my whole childhood and teenage years just a few miles down the road from the Blue Lotus Temple's land. When I graduated from Woodstock High School in 1996, I left Woodstock to attend college in Chicago, and did not return to Woodstock much. In the early 2000s, however, my mother, still living in Woodstock, became very ill, and I traveled up often from the city to care for her. While in Chicago, I began developing a yoga practice and was increasingly interested in Buddhist philosophy and teachings.

One night she and I were talking, and she mentioned she had seen something in the newspaper about a Buddhist group that met at the Unitarian church in Woodstock. She told me they had a parade on the square that drew protesters! I was intrigued by this and told her I planned to visit this group for meditation. Generally, anything people were protesting in Woodstock was something I wanted to be a part of!

My mother did not know much about Buddhism and asked me a lot of questions about it—questions I was pretty ill prepared to answer at that time! I think she was fearful of something that seemed so new and different, but she offered her support. I had the pleasure of joining Bhante Sujatha for sittings a half dozen times or so before my mother passed away and I did not have occasion to be in Woodstock anymore. What I remember most was Bhante's joyfulness and how comfortable he was in his own skin. It was truly a gift to find this small gem in Woodstock that provided me with so much during that time!

In large part because of these experiences, in the years between then and now, I made

a formal study and practice of meditation. I went to graduate school and obtained a doctorate in clinical psychology, researching how Buddhist philosophy and Eastern wisdom could be integrated with Western psychology, and began my own more formal practice with many wonderful teachers. Many other Western psychologists and neuroscientists are also doing work and research in this area, and there are a number of collaborations with these researchers and His Holiness The Dalai Lama. Much beneficial understanding has, and continues to, come from these collaborative endeavors—because both Western psychology and Buddhism seek the same outcome: to understand the human condition and alleviate suffering. Now I and many others teach mindfulness programs in hospitals, clinics, schools, and corporations that help many people live with more ease.

So now many years later, I live in Arizona. A few weeks ago, a friend sent me an e-mail asking if I would like to attend a few workshops with a visiting monk, who turned out to be none other than Bhante Sujatha! Though the memories from Woodstock long ago had faded a little, I remembered Bhante's joy and lightness and was eager to attend! I could not believe what a small world it truly was. I had the good fortune to attend Bhante's teachings on loving-kindness and mindfulness this past weekend, and as always, found much truth, wisdom, humor, and relevance to his teachings. What a gift!

I send much Metta with this note to Bhante Sujatha and the Blue Lotus sangha in my hometown of Woodstock! May you all be safe, strong, happy and live with ease. ❀



© David Schmidt 2010

My Walk

by David Schmidt

I walk with you through thick and thin
I judge, I condemn, then again look within
I stumble so often, while I still forge ahead
My anger, my worries, they're all in my head
For seeing the Dharma, which never can falter
I sit on a cushion before some small altar
But the things that I see, that lie deep within me
May just truly be, the one and the only, my skeleton key
An old troubled heart, that struggles to find
Grasping for answers, somewhere deep in my mind
There's no peace, there's no love, from some far away source
There is simply just me, who plows like a horse
But seeing the way, on this path that I've chosen
I'm walking alone, so cold almost frozen
So pay me no mind, for these tears that I shed
For they benefit no one, it's the life I have led
But still my Heart beats, so my breath I will follow
While stuck in this wheel, sometimes feeling hollow
Till one day I see, that the truth's in the Dharma
The Buddha was right, there's an end to Samsara

Kill the Interpreter

by Denise VanVliet DD, LMT



Imagine the scene: You're giving a lecture or workshop and you are already nervous. You have thoughts of, "What if I fail? What if I suck? What if I forget something? What if I look stupid?"

You get over your nerves and you get up and begin

the lecture. You start off rocky but it begins to smooth out. You're on a roll! Everything is going smoothly. Then, without warning, someone just gets up and leaves the room. Your thoughts start racing: "What did I say? They don't like my presentation. I suck!" As these thoughts start racing through your head, you begin to sweat and your heart starts racing. You begin to suffer.

Another scene: You are walking to your desk at the office and see a fellow employee. Normally you cordially smile at each other. Well, this time this person does not smile back. Your thoughts begin with, "What did I do wrong? This person must be angry or not happy with me." And you start digging through your memory of a possibility of a wrong that was committed. You begin to suffer.

These are just two scenarios where our thoughts start to interpret a situation and we believe these thoughts as true. Without questioning these thoughts, we begin to suffer in the body and mind. Contemporary neuroscience identifies a particular part of the brain, sometimes called, *The Interpreter*, as a source of the familiar internal narrative that gives us our sense of self. The Interpreter, when believed at face value, can really cause a great deal of suffering.

A professor of neuroscience at the University of Southern California, Antonio Damasio, says it this way: "Perhaps the most important revelation is precisely this: that the left cerebral hemisphere of humans is prone to fabricating verbal narratives that do not necessarily accord with the truth."

"All things are preceded by the mind, led by the mind, created by the mind." ~ Buddha

So our thoughts create these stories that we believe to be true. Michael Gazzaniga, Professor of Psychology and the Director for the SAGE Center for the Study of Mind at the University of California, writes:

The left brain weaves its story in order to convince itself and you that it is in full control...What is so adaptive about having what amounts to a spin doctor in the left brain? The interpreter is really trying to keep our personal story together. To do that, we have to learn to lie to ourselves.

The Buddha once summarized his entire teachings in one sentence: "I teach about suffering and the way to end it." To end this type of suffering that we bring upon ourselves is to *kill the Interpreter*. Well, we can't literally kill this part of ourselves, but when we have these thoughts, notice where these thoughts are coming from. Observe them and notice how your body responds to these thoughts.

So again with the scene; you are giving a workshop. It's completely natural to be nervous. The workshop is going well and all of a sudden, someone gets up and leaves. You can hear The Interpreter begin its narrative of what it thinks is happening. You just observe and then say to yourself, I do not know why that person is leaving. I hope they are okay. And you continue with the workshop. No racing thoughts, no reaction to the stress that it creates in the body. No suffering.

The next scene; walking to your desk and you see your fellow worker, no smile. You can feel The Interpreter making up its story of what could be wrong. You let it go and send heartfelt blessings to that person and wish them a good day—whether out loud or in your mind. No stress, no response in the body. No suffering.

Noticing when The Interpreter starts to take over by making up a story and becoming aware of how your body responds is a step toward awakening and letting go of the suffering that we cause within ourselves. Noticing how this simple change, by killing The Interpreter, changes how you reduce your own suffering. ❖

Use the Ladder, My Friend!

by Amber Nancarrow



Imagine, for a moment, a dog chasing his tail. What happens? The dog goes around and around and never really ever catches his tail or gets anywhere with what he's trying to accomplish, which is to scratch an itch. It's a pretty funny sight to watch, but is

also probably pretty aggravating to the dog.

Just imagine having this constant itch that you can never reach and even though you know it's there, and you have the tools to make it go away, you just can't seem to get the relief you seek. What an uncomfortable feeling that must be, to say the least.

Yet, as human beings, we too are like the dog chasing his tail. We go around and around with all these feelings and thoughts that keep surfacing. Many of us, especially most who are reading this newsletter, have been involved with Buddhism for many years. Some almost as long as Bhante Sujatha! We've studied it. We've practiced it. We've been to many retreats, meditation classes, and Sutra classes; we have read books on it and have seen different speakers from different traditions. We "get it." But still, the emotions come up, the arguments happen, the disappointments and all the endless possibilities of mentality surface for us and we wonder, "Why?" Why do I have these depressions or emotional burdens when I "get" Buddhism?

Well, guess what? You don't get it! Seriously! It reminds me of this one time I was on the verge of tears while talking to a senior monk. He asked me why I was crying and I told him, "Oh, I get it," (meaning about the Buddhist concept we were talking about). He just laughed at me and said matter of

fact like, "No you don't!" Of course I laughed at that because it was true. If I really "got it" I wouldn't be crying.

But the other thing to understand is that emotions are normal. Everyone goes through them, experiences them, and learns how to manage them. Sometimes people manage them in productive ways, sometimes in unproductive ways, and sometimes a mix of the two! The key, then, is to learn how to manage them effectively.

Remember the dog chasing his tail? It wasn't a very effective way to remedy his situation, was it? So, too, giving in and reacting to your emotional drama isn't effective either. If you've studied Buddhism for so many years and say you "get it," then get it! Do what you know you need to do to make this work for you. No, *ifs*, *ands*, or *buts*.

Did you catch yourself getting ready to say "But...?" You have the teacher (and if you don't, then get one!). Go to meditation class. Be active in the Blue Lotus Temple's activities. And most importantly, practice. If you want to get "out" of the drama and "into" a peaceful life, then practice. Remember the old saying, "Practice what you preach?" It couldn't be any truer than now. Practice, practice, practice! Let me put it like this. If you were in a deep hole and next to you was a ladder, and you told me, "Hey, I want to get out of this hole. I know about ladders and I know how to use them, but I'm still in this hole, what can I do?" You know, I would have to laugh at you! I might ask, "Is this a joke?"

Use the ladder my friend! You know what to do and you have the tools to get the job done. I am here to simply remind you: USE THE LADDER!!! I cannot help you climb...I'm not that strong! Hahahah! You'll have to climb yourself! Like a runner finishing a big race, I am on the sidelines shouting and cheering for you to finish strong! All the success is at your mental fingertips. May you finally realize how to scratch your itch! May you find the relief you seek. ♥



VISIT OUR CAFEPRESS STORE

www.cafepress.com/bluelotustemple



WE'RE ON iTUNES

Search for "Blue Lotus Temple" in iTunes for our podcast and albums



BOOKMARKS

After reading *Uncle Ry's Moon*, a story about giving for the sake of giving ("dana" in Pali), the children in the Buddha Kids program had fun coloring bookmarks for the Las Vegas Sangha. Even the youngest children were willing to send theirs off in the mail as a gift from our group to theirs.



BUDDHA OVER MOUNTAINS

Artist: Tod Nielsen

A Japanese concept executed in a Tibetan style. Meant to evoke universal Buddha Nature. Medium: Gouache and watercolor on canvas (image) and gilded Bodhi Tree leaves on paper (frame).

Photo by David Schmidt



© David Schmidt 2011

BUDDHA AT THE "PEACE OUT" MEDITATION EVENT ON SATURDAY, APRIL 2, 2011
Photographer: David Schmidt