

# Three Jewels

QUARTERLY: FEB—APR 2011  
WWW.BLUELOTUSTEMPLE.ORG

THE NEWSLETTER OF BLUE LOTUS BUDDHIST TEMPLE

## OUR 7<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL NEW YEAR'S *Blessing Ceremony*



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Photo By: David Schmidt



# Three Jewels

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SEND US YOUR THOUGHTS, ANNOUNCEMENTS, ARTICLES & ART!  
DEADLINE FOR THE SPRING ISSUE IS MARCH 31, 2011.

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**CONTACT**

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

Telephone: (815) 444-8915

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

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

**ABBOT**

Bhante Sujatha Peradeniye

**EDITOR**

John Stanley

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

**GRAPHIC DESIGNER**

Bibi Dowell

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

**ORDAINED SANGHA**

**CHICAGOLAND, IL & SOUTHERN WISCONSIN**

Bhante Sanyatha

Bhante Samita

Bhikkuni Vimala

**PEORIA, IL**

Bhante Rahula

**PRESIDENT**

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**TREASURER**

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Brian Waspi, Kristin Hannah, Julie Gibson

## Feedback about the New Format of *Three Jewels*

Holy moly this is AWESOME! There are so many cool things; I don't know where to start. This is super duper incredibly professional and awesome looking! Outstanding work you guys. I like how it's organized, the flow, the consistent yet gently varied graphics. The list goes on and on. Really exceeded anything I thought this would be. How fortunate we are to have something so professional and the talent to put it together. Great work you guys. This is really one of the best newsletters I've ever seen. I'm not just saying that, and I've seen my share of newsletters. So great, excited to show the community! Thank you thank you thank you!

—Brian Waspi

Outstanding job on the newsletter! I love it!

—David Schmidt

I just read the newsletter and wanted to let you know what a great job you did. Blue Lotus has some very talented and creative people.

Blessings.

—Jayson Warn

## What Do You Think?

Siddhartha's Noble truth says that the root of all suffering is desire. Every time we meditate we repeat, "May all beings be well, happy, and peaceful." This is clearly something we want or desire: the well-being of all beings. However, being a desire, it will lead to suffering according to Siddhartha. This does indeed seem to be the case since if I see someone suffering, I too suffer. So are we practicing to suffer every time we meditate?

—Jim Kail

## Healing Through Loving-Kindness Workshop

The last workshop was a life-changing experience for me. Truly. A complete shift of mind and perspective with physical connections. I'm failing in trying to explain it – the closest I can come is that, for once, I finally understood the part in the Bible where the woman touches Jesus' robes and is healed. I "got" that it's not about the robes, or even about Jesus, but about understanding the true connectedness of all consciousness, and that to our physical bodies. At least that's what struck me (like a lightning bolt, I have to add) and has stayed with me since.

—Julian Salinas

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

# 7<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL NEW YEAR'S Blessing Ceremony



BY AMANDA GARCIA

The Blue Lotus Buddhist Temple hosted its 7<sup>th</sup> Annual New Year's Blessing Ceremony at the Unitarian Universalist Church in Woodstock, Illinois on December 11, 2010. Nine monks and nuns from around the country conducted the ceremony before a full house of attendees.

Pine boughs, red ribbons, and white lights adorned the interior of the church for the evening ceremony. A golden statue of the Buddha

sat upon the altar, framed from behind by an oversized wreath. A yellow-toned gazebo, constructed from intricately cut paper and glowing from within, stood on the left side of the stage.

The ceremony began with the monks' procession into the gazebo accompanied by live drumming. After all the monks were seated in the gazebo, the attention turned to the golden Buddha statue placed on the altar. The venerable Bhikkuni Vimala and Bhikkuni Madika opened

the altar by lighting candles before the Buddha statue.

Brian Waspi delivered opening remarks and introduced the venerable Bhikkuni Madika, a visiting nun from the Dhamma Dena Women's Monastery in California, who delivered a Dhamma talk on the power of blessings and chants.

Bhikkuni Madika recalled her early days in the monastery where she continually questioned, why do we chant? The short answer—tradition.

However, chanting serves the mind as a method of memorization and also serves the body as a form of breathing, which can become shallow when practicing seated meditation. Bhikkuni Madika shared her efforts to create more Westernized chants for English speakers, including a short, emphatic “Hoorah Buddha!” Bhikkuni Madika closed her talk by wishing the audience the ability to understand their attachments to things they enjoy, their aversion to things they dislike, and to recognize their

ignorance in distinguishing between the two.

Following the Dhamma talk, items from the audience were collected in a basket to receive blessings from the monks. The basket was filled with photos, pieces of jewelry, prayer cards, and other personal items. As the items were collected, Danuta and Jim Schuessler brought flowers to the monks in the gazebo and also lit candles for the gazebo.

Bhante Sanyatha then took center stage and led a brief loving-kindness meditation for the audience.

Following the meditation, all the monks and nuns retreated to the gazebo to begin the chanting. The chanting commenced with a single male voice and continued in a flowing chorus of voices swelling and retreating in Pali. The chanting continued without interruption for nearly an hour, filling every corner of the church.

At the conclusion of the chanting, offerings were collected from the audience for the Blue Lotus Temple. The audience was then invited to the stage to receive mindfulness

bracelets made by the monks. Nearly every single member of the audience lined up to receive a saffron colored mindfulness bracelet to commemorate the blessing.

After the conclusion of the ceremony and closing of the altar, the audience and monks met together in the church basement to eat, chat, and take photos. Despite the icy, rainy weather that evening, everyone in attendance demonstrated the warmth and commitment of the Blue Lotus Temple community. 🌸



Photos by David Schmidt

# Blue Lotus Las Vegas

by Amber Nancarrow

For those who don't know, we started our group, *Blue Lotus Insight Meditation Center*, here in Las Vegas in 2007 under the direction of your, and our, beloved Bhante Sujatha! The idea was to make a "sister" temple here, and throughout the years we've been blessed to have Bhante visit us every few months.

During this past year of 2010, we had a resident monk for five months and then two visiting monks since Bhante, as you all know, has been so busy! We are a group that is scattered around the valley (Las Vegas is a valley!) and some of our members have

their own groups that meet weekly at various places.

When a monk comes to visit us, we all collect together for meditation classes, retreats, and other gatherings such as a recent public speech and evening dinner with Bhante Saranapala. We have a *Meetup* website and now a *Facebook* page to help our community know about what's going on and to provide information to them that might help their spiritual growth. During the times when we don't have a monk visiting us, we pretty much just go our own ways. We have been discussing the possibility of hosting a temporary resident monk

for one year. Currently we have one in mind, but it will depend on if he's able to make that commitment.

Our overall goal, though, is to have a resident monk permanently here in town. He would conduct meditation classes and be the abbot of our group. We have been saving money to purchase a house, and just remembering that (as Bhante Sujatha would say), *Slowly is Holy!*

That's our scoop! Should we have kept it in Vegas? Hahahaha! Well, if you want the real scoop, you'll have to come here—our lips are sealed! Peace and Blessings. ♡

*Our overall goal, though, is to have a resident monk permanently here in town. He would conduct meditation classes and be the abbot of our group.*

# Buddha Kids Update

by Kristen Carpenter



Keira Stanley makes a mandala with Goldfish crackers—  
a recent activity in *Buddha Kids*.

#### CONTACT INFO

Kristen Carpenter

Email: [sperc73@hotmail.com](mailto:sperc73@hotmail.com)

#### WHEN

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

#### WHERE

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

#### REMINDER

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

The Fall Buddha Kids classes have come and gone like the crisp autumn leaves of the season, imparting a sense of transient beauty as they go. The peaceful Winter season has settled over McHenry County, and now is a time for introspection and reflection. With the theme of “Quiet Reflection” as our guide, the children will continue to practice their meditation and focus on the Dharma.

In the January–March classes, the children will be reunited with the author Jon J. Muth. We will be focusing on his stories in the book *Zen Shorts*. Each short story will be accompanied by a craft that ties in with the theme of Reflection.

On January 8<sup>th</sup>, we read the short story, *A Heavy Load*, which touches on the concept of how we carry negative thoughts with us, and how those thoughts can weigh us

down. The children were asked to drop their “heavy” thoughts (written in water-dissolvable ink) into a water dish and watch as the words disappeared from the paper.

On February 5<sup>th</sup>, we read another short story entitled, *The Farmer’s Luck*. The author explains that things are not good or bad, they just *are*, and that living in the present moment gives us perspective. For this class, I asked the parents to help their children

bring in found/recycled objects for the children to turn into necklaces.

On March 5<sup>th</sup>, we will be reading the short story, *Uncle Ry and the Moon*. Here the author focuses on how material items are not where true beauty lies. The children will be doing a coloring/art project for their craft and a special “Moon Meditation.”

# 2010 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter Financials

Financial Assets as of 01/01/2011: \$51,875.83

## INCOME

**Total Net Income:** \$17,070.70

**Pledges:** \$1,875.00

**Amazon.com Associates Bookstore:** \$26.80

**Cafepress.com Online Store:** \$12.75 *(total earnings were \$72.70 minus a yearly fee of \$59.95)*

## EXPENSES

**Land Loan Balance as of 12/10/2010:** \$52,122.68 *(we incorrectly stated the balance as \$50,380.95 in the last issue)*

**Land Loan:** \$1,492.50

**Rent to Unitarian Church:** \$375.00



## Board Members Brian Waspi and Kristen Hannah Get Married at Sea

After six happy years together, Brian Waspi and Kristen Hannah got married on January 8, 2011 on the cruise ship, *MV Explorer*. Bhante Sujatha officiated the ceremony as the ship sailed in the Caribbean between Nassau, Bahamas and San Juan, Puerto Rico. Bhante also held several meditation sessions, both for the wedding guests and the *Semester at Sea* community aboard the ship. Congratulations, Brian and Kristen!



Email your announcement (births, weddings, anniversaries, passings) to [media@bluelotustemple.org](mailto:media@bluelotustemple.org) to be included in our next newsletter.

Blue Lotus Temple thanks DharmaCrafts for their generous donation of a zafu and zabuton (meditation cushion set) for our Buddha Kids class. Please click their ad below to shop their online catalog.



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# Ask Bhante Sujatha

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](mailto: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.



## THREE JEWELS: BHANTE, WHY THE NAME “BLUE LOTUS BUDDHIST TEMPLE”?

Bhante: The lotus grows in muddy water and the flower never touches the mud. This is how we must live. The mud represents the society that we live in and the need to survive. We must learn to live in society without hurting ourselves or touching the mud. This is how we serve others, by being part of the society and remaining above the mud. The blue lotus is a very rare lotus flower.

## WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE IN THIS CULTURE FOR A MONK AS COMPARED TO IN SRI LANKA?

We have to go with the culture we are in and change with it. It is a very simple life in Sri Lanka for a monk. It is much more complicated here. More energy and work is required in this society to keep your practice. A long-term practice helps to keep you strong.

## WHY DO MONKS TRAVEL TO DIFFERENT COUNTRIES? ARE THEY LIKE MISSIONARIES?

The Buddha said to travel and share the teachings and practice, and that is just what the monks do. There is no conversion involved and it is not to create followers. “Come and see,” said the Buddha—not come and believe.

## WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BUDDHISM AND OTHER RELIGIONS?

Buddhism is a way of life. Most faith-based religions require something to believe in. In Buddhism, you don't

depend on anyone else; you are your own savior. You take complete responsibility for yourself and your actions, both good and bad.

#### SO WHAT IS THE BUDDHIST ATTITUDE TOWARDS OTHER RELIGIONS?

Be respectful of all other religions and beliefs. Go to their centers, build friendships, and be very supportive. Avoid dogmatic ideas and clinging to these ideas.

#### BHANTE, YOU HAVE BEEN A MONK SINCE YOU WERE 11 YEARS OLD. WHAT DIFFERENCES DO YOU SEE IN MONKS WHO STARTED VERY YOUNG IN LIFE AS COMPARED TO SOMEONE WHO BECOMES A MONK LATER IN LIFE?

If you want to use the words *good* and *bad*, they are in both groups. Young monks have very good training and are easier to train. Some, though, don't take the guidance because they are young and will eventually disrobe. A monk who is trained from a young age has a noticeable difference in the way he talks and his actions. People who become monks later in life are different in that, a lot of times, they are more difficult to train, don't listen as readily, and are a little more problematic. They have lived the lay life for a long time and have developed habits that make it more difficult to adapt readily. The difference is that most monks who start later in life will stay, are dedicated, and will not disrobe.

#### WHY DO WE MEDITATE? WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF MEDITATION?

We meditate to take care of ourselves. It helps us to heal our wounds, which we all have. We are cultivating our minds; developing skillful qualities and eliminating unskillful qualities in our mind. Not only can we take care of ourselves, we can then help take care of others.

#### IS THERE ANYTHING TO WATCH FOR WHEN WE MEDITATE? ARE THERE ANY DANGERS?

The person who practices should come with an open mind and not with a dogmatic Buddhist mind. Observing yourself and avoiding beliefs keeps this from becoming an issue. The practice should be just that: a practice and not a religion. Also, it is very important to have a teacher or to have contact with one. A teacher is someone who can answer questions and can keep you centered. Meditation is not about having visions. There can be delusion involved and a teacher can help you with this or point this out to you.

#### COULD YOU ELABORATE A LITTLE MORE ON THE TEACHER'S ROLE IN THE PRACTITIONER'S LIFE?

A guide is very important, especially for new students. It is very difficult for new students to continue their practice without the support of a loving and compassionate teacher. The teacher knows the students' temperaments and their personality characteristics and can help them where needed. Students need the right kind of interaction to build confidence and to strengthen their practice.

#### WHAT IF SOMEONE DOESN'T BELIEVE IN ALL THE PARTS OF BUDDHISM, SUCH AS REINCARNATION? DO YOU HAVE TO BE A BUDDHIST TO JOIN THE GROUP?

There are no prerequisites to join any of the meditation groups. Come and see if this is right for you. You don't need to know anything or to believe anything. We don't need to use the word *Buddhism*. The term *breathe-ism* is more appropriate since the breath is the foundation of the practice.

#### WHY DO WE TAKE PRECEPTS? DOES THIS MEAN WE ARE BECOMING BUDDHISTS?

Precepts help us to build the foundation of a virtuous mind. *Foundation* seems to be a good word to use because people don't react to words like discipline and morals as well, even though these are involved. A good foundation helps us to stay clear with less guilt. Without a good moral foundation, it is very difficult to stay clear in our lives. This is all about living a good life—not becoming a Buddhist, but becoming a Buddha.

HOW DOES ONE GO ABOUT HAVING A PERSONAL VISIT WITH A MONK?

You can call or email [mail@bluelotustemple.org] and request a personal or a *noble visit* with one of the monks.

WHAT IS USUALLY INVOLVED IN THIS MEETING?

This is an informal visit. We sit for tea. It lasts about an hour. There is a short meditation and discussion.

IS THERE ANYTHING SPECIAL THAT I HAVE TO KNOW BEFORE I COME FOR A VISIT? IS THERE A FEE OR DO I NEED TO BRING ANYTHING?

Proper attire is requested. Tank tops, short shorts, or revealing outfits are not recommended. There is no charge for a visit but donations are always welcome. Offerings of flowers to the Buddha, homemade foods, and perishable foods can always be used at the temple.

NOW BHANTE, LET'S GO TO THE EVERYDAY PRACTICAL CONCERNS SUCH AS FINANCIAL. HOW DO YOU SURVIVE? HOW DO YOU PAY YOUR BILLS? DO YOU GET A SALARY IN YOUR POSITION?

There is no salary or compensation involved. This is not a paid job. Monks take a vow of poverty. Traditionally, the monks have an alms bowl that is used to go out to collect offerings. Whatever the monk is offered, money or food for everyday requirements, he accepts. The monastic code states that the monks cannot ask for anything and have to wait for what is offered. In this culture, it is a little more complicated and money is very important. We have people that give personal donations that help us pay for our bills. Our condominium and bills are paid by offerings from these people.

WHAT ABOUT DONATIONS TO THE TEMPLE? CAN'T YOU USE SOME OF THOSE FUNDS?

Very little of any money that is given to the temple is ever used for any expenses. Just about all of any money donated goes toward the building fund, which in turn goes toward the future building of our temple.

WHAT IF SOMEONE WOULD LIKE TO HELP THE MONKS WITH PERSONAL EXPENSES? HOW WOULD THEY GO ABOUT DOING THAT?

Anyone can write out a check or give money stating specifically that this is for monks' expenses. This is considered a gift and these funds would not go through the temple. Any donation that is received or money that is spent by the temple has to be accounted for.

WHAT IF SOMEONE HAS NO MONEY TO GIVE? HOW CAN THEY HELP OUT THE TEMPLE?

First come to meditation and don't look at money as a burden. Talk to the monks about this and don't let this affect your practice. Practice is the most important thing. You can always volunteer your time and skills. We always have events and fundraisers that we need help with. Share the practice with others. Maybe in the future when you have some money you can contribute.

IS THERE ANY OTHER WAY WE CAN HELP THE TEMPLE?

Yes. We are always looking for new ways to raise funds. New ideas for fundraisers are always welcome. You can help organize these fundraisers. Maybe you know of someone we can approach for financial backing, possibly a corporate backer.

WHAT EXPENSES DOES THE TEMPLE HAVE AT THIS TIME?

We currently pay rent to the Unitarian Church to use the space for our meditation and fundraisers. We have a loan for the land that we pay on every month. We also have miscellaneous expenses such as legal fees and accounting fees.

WHO DECIDES HOW WE SPEND OUR MONEY? WHO MAKES THE DECISIONS FOR THE TEMPLE AND FOR THE FUTURE OF THE TEMPLE?

We have the Temple Board of Directors. They make all of their decisions for the Temple. The Board is a harmonious group, which views all of this as part of their practice, and makes decisions based on that. *(Note: To see our current financial situation, see the financial report in this issue of Three Jewels.)*

WHAT IS OUR GOAL FINANCIALLY? HOW MUCH MONEY WILL IT TAKE TO BUILD OUR TEMPLE?

Idealistically, it would be good to have around \$400,000 to build the temple and prepare the land for our use, including the current land loan. Realistically speaking, we need consistent income to be able to maintain a temple. This is why pledges are so important to our growth. We need to feel confident that we would have the money it would take every month to pay our mortgage. For this to happen we would need about \$2000 every month in pledged money.

SOME PEOPLE ARE VERY TIRED ABOUT GOING TO ANY CHURCH OR SPIRITUAL ORGANIZATION BECAUSE THEY ARE ASKED FOR MONEY ALL OF THE TIME. WHAT IS YOUR THOUGHT?

I know we can't live without money in this society. I never ask anything for myself personally, but I can ask for the community. For example, the church we use for our practice is over 100 years old. Just imagine how many people spent their money, time, and energy for this place. It is now a hundred years later and we are still using it. I think that good contributions will come from the heart. Give what you can. Don't give because of your guilt. Practicing giving is part of our spiritual journey. Once, Buddha said, "If we don't know how to share and how to give, there is no practice." My suggestion for everyone is: Practice every day, then your practice will guide you in the right direction. Empty...Empty... Happy...Happy! LOL. 🌸

# Cheers to a New Year and another Chance for a Sense of Buddha



This is the first newsletter of 2011. 2010 is over now and we have a brand new 12 months ahead. Let's be grateful to last year and say cheers to 2011. We all have positive and negative memories and challenges from last year, but now that year is gone. Why bother dwelling on the past? Did you learn anything from last year? Take these lessons and move on.

Smile ... smile ... smile ... a lot!

I think the year 2011 is another chance for us to find the Buddha. Have you thought about that? I feel and see that we have that opportunity within all of us; the

problem is we don't see it because of our aversion. We are so attached to the little comfort that we have, but is it real comfort? I don't think so. More than we enjoy that little comfort, we suffer from it because we are trapped and attached. Persons who are attached to comfort never make a difference in this world.

So look within and find your true nature: your Buddha nature! It does not matter who you are, what color you are, or what race you are—we all have a Buddha nature inside of ourselves. Do you feel it?

Sit still. Listen to your heart. Breathe in and out slowly. Calm down your mind and find some time to think about who you are and what you are. By doing that, we can all feel Buddha is within and next to us.

May you be well, happy, and peaceful!

# Seeking Volunteers to Wash Laundry for the Homeless

The PADS (Public Action to Deliver Shelter) network of McHenry County, Illinois is seeking volunteers to wash laundry for the homeless at their facility in Cary, IL. The laundry is done in the basement of the SS. Peter and Paul Parish Center (410 N. First St., Cary, IL) where there is a washer and dryer. The stairs to the basement are fairly steep—just want to mention that because it is a hindrance to some folks. Bed linens (no blankets) and any towels that are used on our site night (Monday night) are washed.

Volunteers are scheduled Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday and the work is done during the Parish Center office hours (Monday–Thursday from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and (if necessary) Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. The volunteer obtains the key from the office and needs to do only two to four loads per shift and, after the three days, it is completed. There are a few procedures to follow (e.g., using bleach and hot water regardless of the colors in the wash load and how the sets of sheets are folded).

I would need to know what day (Tuesday–Thursday) works best and I will set you up with one of our experienced volunteers to be trained. It would likely take only 10–15 minutes to do this or it is possible that the trainer could meet you at the Parish Center basement on your first scheduled shift.

The schedule will cover February through April. The PADS season ends April 30th so our last site night would be April 25th. If this year is not possible, you can consider for next season, starting in October.

Anyone interested can contact me at [Mary.Badgley@protective.com](mailto:Mary.Badgley@protective.com) or [philbadgley@comcast.net](mailto:philbadgley@comcast.net).



# Green Buddha

by Norm Carpenter

There is an interesting intersection between Buddha's teachings on attachment, the implications in a consumer-driven economy, the notion of leading a simpler lifestyle, and the conservative (green) movement. It goes something like this: As we are less attached to things, we want fewer things, we have fewer things, we buy fewer things, and we provide more for ourselves. We become more mindful of the environment we live in. We become more makers and less shoppers. We become more producers and less consumers.

This isn't some idealistic economic theory spun by talking heads on the news; It's notions we already understand. It's fresh basil from the pot on your kitchen counter for topping pizzas and pasta versus a dried-out sprig from the grocery store for three dollars. It's fresh cherry tomatoes on your salad, picked from a pot on your patio, cared for with love, and eaten juicy and still warm from the sun. It's a present of a bookmark made with glue and scissors

and pictures and a cut-up cereal box, or a hand-drawn birthday card from someone who cares about you, versus spending four dollars on the same from a store. It's sidewalk-chalk pictures that disappear with the rain, and sand castles that disappear with the tide, and letting things come and go naturally without attachment.

At one time in the 20th century, during WWII, millions of Americans had a Victory Garden, and we supplied millions of pounds of our own produce. We taught our children and friends and neighbors how to grow something, how to produce something, how to care for the soil and the things growing in it. It filled something in ourselves that buying things never will. We had more lemonade and ice cream socials, and potlucks, and dinner parties, and your aunt's apple pie with apples from her own tree. We gave of ourselves, from our homes and from nature, instead of swiping the credit card and doing the dash-and-dine at restaurants, or sitting next to each

other at the movies at nine dollars each, or sitting in front of the TV and not talking to each other, and saying it's "quality" time.

In the end, it's a down-home, good-for-the-heart lifestyle that makes our lives more enjoyable. It's about giving, and sharing, and making, and doing. And less about things.

"Whoever overcomes this wretched craving, so difficult to overcome, from him sorrows fall away like water from a lotus leaf."—Verse 336

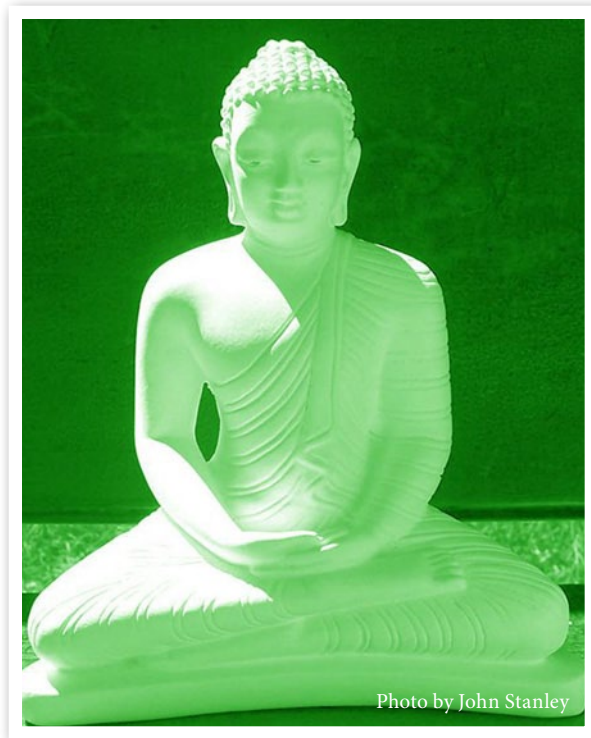
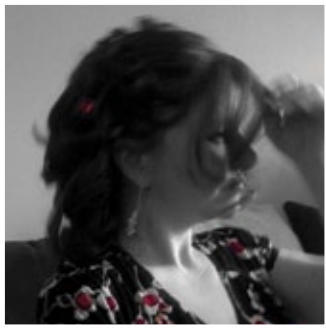


Photo by John Stanley

"Irrigators regulate the waters, fletchers straighten arrow shafts, carpenters shape wood, and the good control themselves"  
—Dhammapada Verse 145

# Finding Peace

by Candy Cotsiomitris



How did I begin my journey into Buddhism? Well, I suppose it started years ago when I was just a young girl. I should preface this story by saying that I was raised a Catholic and went to Catholic school, kindergarten through fourth grade, but I never felt at peace in the church and as I grew older I became more at odds with some of the teachings and manmade rules and regulations set forth by the hierarchy. With that said, the true downward spiral from myself, my faith, my home, and any peace I may have had began on what was a beautiful spring day in March of 1990 when I was just 14 years old. It was the day I was attacked and raped by two Latin King gang members, changing my life forever.

Among the many things (and there were many things) that I lost in those moments was what little faith I had left in any god or higher power. *Why?* I asked. Why would a god who loved his “children” so much let this happen to a little girl? If it were just that

question, I may have made it back to the little faith I had. The proverbial nail in the coffin occurred when I went to my parish priest as an emotionally and physically violated young girl looking for support and direction. Though my own parents were not supportive and placed blame on me largely because they themselves were unable to deal with it, I thought certain that a man of God would help me. How wrong I was.

I still remember walking into the rectory and sitting down on the couch as nervous as could be. Slowly, I explained what happened and told him of my parents’ lack of support. His whole demeanor changed from the time I walked in as I told the story. As the meeting came to a close, I sat listening and waiting for his direction, for a hug and for an “it’s not your fault.” Instead, what he told me that day has never left my mind. He said, “Say three *Hail Mary’s* and five of *The Lord’s Prayer* and be sure to ask God for forgiveness; you’ll need his forgiveness from sin.” I thought, *Wait... what?* Why am I asking for

God’s forgiveness? I’m the victim here! With that, I severed what little ties to the church I had.

I wish I could say that was the turning point for me but it wasn’t. It was the start of several years of being “lost.” I continued to blame myself because it seemed everyone else was blaming me, including the priest, and I felt such guilt and shame. This went on for several years as I battled depression and post traumatic stress disorder. During those years, I would have never been able to say, “it is what it is.” I relied heavily on the support of my friends and my then-boyfriend, now husband. I was completely dependent on them for my self-worth and for my feeling of safety and security. They did the best they could to manage me and my mood swings. They stood by me through so much and still stand by me to this day.

I was never at peace inside; I was out of control. In spite of all of that, I managed to finish junior college and become a Licensed Physical Therapist Assistant. In my mind, I couldn’t help myself,

so I would help others instead and I immediately knew that this was the job I was meant to do. I spent one year working in a nursing home and then moved on to home-care from there. I truly enjoy helping people in whatever way I can. Through my job, I've met so many interesting patients with stories and life lessons. I've been blessed to be able to spend time not only helping and teaching them but learning from them as well.

All of that brings me to Buddhism or at least how I began my journey into Buddhism. In 2005, I believe, I was assigned a patient that was only 16 at the time. He had been in a car accident and sustained a brain injury. After spending some time in a coma and then an inpatient rehab, he was released home and that's where I stepped in. From a therapy standpoint, he was weak, balance was horrible, and he walked with great difficulty. He was, at first, a young man of few words.

During treatments, I tried to engage him in conversation about things that I thought a 16-year-old might be interested in like *Star Wars* or video games, but little seemed to interest him. His parents then told me that prior to the accident, his passion was writing and they showed me some poetry that he had written. I was taken aback and completely amazed at what I read. This young man was an old soul. His writings were deeply mature for his young age. I now understood what (at the time) his disinterested mood was about. I felt it—it was a feeling I had come to know quite well over the years. Would his life ever be the same? Would he write the same again? Could he write? One other thing: Why did this happen?

Physically, he improved quickly and eventually went on to outpatient therapy, but before that happened he called me out one day: “What are you hiding from?” he asked. I was angry. How dare this kid question me? After all, I thought, I'm not hiding—or am I? He was right. I was indeed hiding and had been for years: hiding from myself.

We remained friends and I saw him often. Meanwhile, he began writing again and was truly an inspiration to me, which prompted me to try to find myself. I did this by first trying to find my faith again. I studied the Bible with the Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Evangelicals, and tried Catholicism again. Nothing. I found nothing and certainly not myself. My friend and I both began studying Hinduism, Sikhism, Jainism, and others by reading books and searching the internet. I was frustrated until one day,

I sat down with (don't laugh) the book, *Buddhism for Dummies*. I took great interest in the book and continued to read before trying meditation on my own. Though I didn't know if I was doing it correctly, my heart told me I was.

Something strange occurred; I felt...at peace in my own skin. I felt no fear. I felt strong. I felt well, happy, and peaceful. Though we remained very close, my friend took the best of what he learned from Buddhism and carried on, perhaps still searching in his life. But for me, I yearned to learn more. Meditation was almost like a drug to me; I felt so empowered while still at peace, but I was missing something. I had the Buddha and the Dharma, but not yet the Sangha.

Enter Blue Lotus. Upon attending my first loving-kindness workshop with Bhante Sujatha, I felt something I hadn't felt in a long time—I felt ME and I felt home. Finally after being the *victim* for so many years, Buddhism helped me become a survivor and most recently a thriver, empowering me to volunteer to help victims of sexual assault through McHenry County's VOICE program. I also began writing a memoir about what I went through, which is something I've wanted to do for years.

If I can help one person by telling my story, then I have succeeded. I look forward to learning more and spending more time with the Sangha. When I do, I feel even more empowered and at peace in my own skin. ❁

# The Hardcore Dharma Movement

by Brooke Schedneck



One of the most interesting new trends in Western Buddhism is a reaction against more ‘soft’ and ‘self-help’ type dharma books. Some contemporary Buddhist authors are now calling themselves hardcore as an opposition to this earlier work. The most outspoken and prolific of the hardcore teachers is Daniel Ingram who wrote, *Mastering the Core Teachings of the Buddha: An Unusually Hardcore Dharma Book*. Kenneth Folk is another teacher of a similar generation as Daniel Ingram who, through his website and podcasts on Buddhist Geeks, carries the hardcore meditation practice message. And now this movement has a second generation as Vince Horn, founder of the Buddhist Geeks, calls himself the first lineage holder of both of these teachers. The changes these dharma teachers are making are very interesting and revealing about the state of Buddhist practice in Western countries.

So what is it that is hardcore about these teachers’ ideas and teachings? What are they opposing themselves to? A description of this movement is found in Daniel Ingram’s biography on the Buddhist Geeks Website where he states that he is part of:

the global movement of meditation reform, a movement that seeks to preserve core meditation technology and supports, integrate helpful aspects from across traditions, refine the techniques and maps through exploration and verification, and spread the

message that it can be done. It is also a movement to strip away the aspects of dogma, ritual, rigid hierarchy, myth and falsehood that hinder high-level practice and keep the culture of meditation mired in unhelpful taboos and misplaced effort.

Kenneth Folk and Daniel Ingram are interested in teaching about the higher-level meditation practices and are defying the taboo against declaring one’s attainments. They have both stated that they are arahants and talk about their experiences attaining the four paths of Enlightenment openly, hoping that others will come to see that attaining this state is possible. In one of his Buddhist Geek Podcast interviews, Folk narrates in detail the moments when he attained the first through fourth path of Enlightenment. Kenneth Folk, in his interview on Buddhist Geeks Podcast called ‘Ordinary People Can Get Enlightened’ stated this outright:

What I really want to say here is that it’s possible to get enlightened. And I know that, because it happened to me...So I’m hoping that by telling the story, other people understand that regular, average people who aren’t wearing robes, and aren’t even Asian. Or whether they’re Asian or not. It is possible for ordinary people to get enlightened.

One of the chapters of Ingram’s *Mastering the Core Teachings*, is called ‘It Is Possible!’ in order to point out that even though many think the end of the path is mythical and unattainable, people do attain these states today. He contrasts the openness in talking about the paths of Enlightenment in Burma with the paradigm you would most likely find in a Western Buddhist. “First, most Western Buddhists don’t really believe that after a few months of good practice you could get enlightened or more enlightened. They do not believe it is simply a matter of following simple instructions, moving through the clearly defined insights” (*Mastering the Core Teachings*, 337). Hardcore teachers, along with revealing their own meditation experiences, critique what they consider typical Western Buddhism. They are reacting against teachings that have more in common with therapy than vipassana, are concerned with self-help and calmness rather than the sometimes destabilizing cycles of insight. They hope that through their writings and teachings, some Western Buddhists can adopt “a more empowering view of what is possible on the spiritual path” (viii).

Ingram in his book considers himself and others from the same lineage “to be dharma cowboys, mavericks, rogues, and outsiders” (ix). Although he considers himself a traditionalist who tries to get to the depths of the Buddha’s teachings, he finds that this kind of practice contrasts with much of Western Buddhist meditation cultures. The mainstream cultures, from the Hardcore dharma perspective, have been designed by certain teachers “who want everyone to be able to feel good that they are doing something ‘spiritual’” (95). But Ingram argues that this kind of teaching is not very helpful. As a solution to this, his book provides an invitation “to step far beyond the increasingly ritualized, bastardized, and gutless mock-up of Buddhism that is rearing its fluffy head in the modern West and has a stranglehold on many a practice group and even some of the big meditation centers” (95).

Ingram also says Western Buddhism is watered-down. He writes that there is a movement to make Buddhism into something for everyone (94). Ingram labels Buddhism in the West the “least goal-oriented, least practical and least effective take on Buddhism I have found anywhere” (117). In contrast to this way of teaching, Ingram characterizes one of his teachers, Bill Hamilton, as a guy who was “too smart, too uncompromising, too scholarly and too dedicated to non-watered-down dharma and to absolute

mastery to be a popular mainstream teacher. He didn’t teach to make people feel good about themselves...” (219). Because of this watered-down approach, Ingram finds that in Western Buddhist meditation circles people are not discussing their attempts to understand and master the teachings or meditation techniques, but rather their own psychological problems. He writes:

I just wish the whole Western Buddhist World would just get over this notion that these practices are all about getting to our Happy Place where nothing can ever hurt us or make us neurotic and move on to actually mastering real Buddhist practice rather than chasing some ideal that will never appear (297).

Ingram and Folk call the cultural factors that led to the state of Buddhism in the West “the Mushroom Factor” because as mushrooms are fed and kept in the dark, meditation teachers are using the mushroom method of teaching and raising a crop of mushroom meditators. Ingram finds that “there is this cultural factor in Western Buddhism that real insight, insight into the fundamental nature of reality or the Three Characteristics, is almost never talked about directly, unlike in Burma or some other settings” (102).

Some may wonder whom in particular Ingram is admonishing here. In fact he has great respect for many of the popular American meditation teachers, such as Jack Kornfield, but believes that their presentation of the teaching is written in a way that perpetuates the Mushroom Factor. He praises Kornfield’s *A Path With Heart* saying it contains many brilliant statements that should confound the reader and hit at their core sense of identity but “as they have been written in a style that is so completely accessible, these statements have nearly the opposite effect, creating a mushy comfort in the reader with statements that should have stopped them in their proverbial tracks and provoked deep inquiry” (89). Because of this, Ingram felt the need for a hardcore book about practice, such as his own.

Daniel Ingram also discusses the taboo of discussing attainments in Western Buddhist culture in a Buddhist Geeks podcast called *The Dharma Overground*: “You know, there’s this sort of a huge taboo, you can’t say you’ve attained to a jhana, and you can’t say you’ve attained to a nana, and you sure as heck can’t say you’ve attained

to a path. And telling people you're an anagami or an arhant would really be crazy." Because of this situation, he started the Dharma Overground website where high-level practitioners could start to get comfortable with talking about attainments. The purpose of this website is to "form a safe haven for people who were into hardcore practice, real attainments, helping people out in the spirit of mutual friends, open conversations about topics related to actual practice, and the like."

This website reveals in detail the maps on the path to Enlightenment in order to balance out the mushroom culture. Ingram offers information on how to know where one is on the path along with his own experiences to help others understand what they are or will be going through. The website's basic principles are: "a lack of taboos surrounding talking about attainments [and] the assumption that the various aspects of meditative development can be mastered in this life." And these are also the basic principles of the hardcore dharma movement, a very interesting new development in the history of

Buddhism in the West.

What does this mean for the future of Buddhism in the West? The hardcore teachers are picking up on the emerging characteristics of Western Buddhist meditation practices, and are opposing themselves to it. It thus shows a growing diversity of practice and options for Buddhists in the West. But how impactful will this new movement be? As Ingram's website grows and the hardcore supporters increase, will other teachers follow the same path? Will there be a paradigm shift in how Westerners think about meditation and interact with the core teachings of the Buddha? ❧

*Brooke Schedneck is an American Ph.D. candidate at Arizona State University doing fieldwork in Thailand under a Fulbright research grant. To read more by Brooke, visit her website: <http://wanderingdhamma.wordpress.com>. Reprinted with permission.*

# What is Bodhi Day?

By John Stanley



A couple of years ago in May, my wife told her Japanese coworker, Sachiko, that we were going to celebrate the Buddha’s birth, death, and enlightenment. Sachiko said, “Buddha’s enlightenment isn’t celebrated in May; it’s celebrated in December.”

It turns out that they were both right. Many of us who attend Blue Lotus Temple know about Vishaka—also called Vesak, or “Buddha Day”—that is celebrated in May, but we may not have heard of Bodhi Day (I certainly hadn’t until this year). While not as popular as the celebration of Vesak, it is celebrated by Mahayana schools including Zen and Pure Land. Apparently, some traditional texts say that the Buddha was enlightened on the 8th day of the 12th month (of the lunar calendar). Because of the different calendar, this day varies each year; but in Japan, it is celebrated on December 8 of our Gregorian calendar.

As Kristen Carpenter taught her students in the *Buddha Kids* class, Bodhi Day can be incorporated with other winter holy-days of light like solstice, Hanukah, Yule, Saturnalia, Kwanzaa, Diwali, Santa Lucia, Festivas, and—oh yeah—Christmas. Start by finding a Bodhi Tree (*ficus religiosa*). They aren’t easy to find: I ordered one for my home and one for the monks’ residence a couple of years ago from a nursery in Texas. My original and its replacement died, while the monks’ tree grew from six inches to a couple of feet high

(what does that tell you?) See the link at the bottom if you’d like to order one for next year. Since it’s a tropical tree, it won’t ship until the spring so it doesn’t freeze in the mail. In the meantime, a widely available ficus benjamina (fig tree or ficus) or other houseplant can suffice. You can even use a small artificial Christmas tree.

To decorate the tree, string beads representing the way all things are connected, colored lights that represent enlightenment, and three ornaments representing the three jewels of Buddhism: The Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. I’ve read several ideas such as eating milk rice the morning of Bodhi Day, leaving cookies by the tree on *Bodhi Day Eve*, and giving a present. Does this all sound a little like Christmas?

I recently learned that the Jewish holiday of Purim, celebrated in the spring, is the traditional gift-giving holiday for Jews; however, Hanukah, which is not actually



Photo by Doug (flickr.com/photos/geraldford)

a high holy day in the Jewish calendar, was given a higher status and began to incorporate gift-giving to give Jewish families (especially children) a holiday to celebrate when their gentile friends were all receiving Christmas gifts. It would seem that Bodhi Day could also be called a Buddhist alternative or compliment to Christmas. What I find interesting, however, is that Christmas itself adapted to other winter holidays of light that fell on or near December 25. According to *Christianity Today*

December 25 already hosted two other related festivals: *natalis solis invicti* (the Roman “birth of the unconquered sun”), and the birthday of Mithras, the Iranian “Sun of Righteousness” whose worship was popular with Roman soldiers. The winter solstice, another celebration of the sun, fell just a few days earlier. Seeing that pagans were already exalting deities with some parallels to the true deity, church leaders decided to commandeer the date and introduce a new festival.

The celebration of Christmas didn’t even start for about 300 years after Christ, and as Muslims believe, Jesus was probably born sometime in the summer (remember the shepherds out in the fields watching their flocks by night?). Winter would not have been a good time for Cesar Augustus to ask everyone to return to their hometown for a census—too cold!

It seems that all of these winter festivals have something in common: It’s dark out there this time of year, and we need more light. I love the late Fall/early Winter with its snow-covered lawns reflecting the light of illuminated houses and main streets, while candles and colorful trees stare at us from warm living rooms on frigid December nights. I just wish we could keep the lights on during the most depressing time of the year for me, January 2 through the March thaw. Maybe we need to invent a new holiday of light for those dark months. Maybe we can declare February the Light of Asia month and get the strings of lights back out. In the meantime, *Merry Happy Bodhi Day!*

RELATED LINKS

- <http://familydharma.pulelehuadesign.com/bodhi.htm>
- <http://bodhitreenursery.com>
- <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ch/news/2000/dec08.html>
- <http://japanlifeandreligion.com/2010/12/03/buddhism-and-bodhi-day-enjoying-the-holiday-season>



# The Spider Web of Happiness

By Amber Nancarrow



You know we all want happiness. It is something common to each and every one of us. It is something we strive for in small and large ways. Just think about your life, from the time you were born up until now, all that you do, whether it's buying a new house or buying new clothes, to dating, marriage, kids, grandkids—no matter whether it is materialistic or interpersonal, everything you do is done under the facet of “happiness.” You might think to yourself, “Ah, now *this* will make me happy.” But have you ever stopped for a moment to analyze what this happiness is and why you need it?

The Buddha grew up in a very wealthy household and every kind of physical and emotional need was met during his childhood and early adult life. But still something urged him to see the unsatisfactory and unsettling nature of this thing we call “happiness.”

Did you know there are 84,000 teachings relating to various ways to apply and understand Buddhism? That is a lot of teachings. There is a lot of information, because the Buddha took various approaches to reach as many people as he could to explain his message. One of his main messages was on happiness. Growing up with all the luxuries of life, and being somewhat contemplative about what he observed, he began to ponder, “What is happiness? What constitutes my ‘self’ being happy?” Then he realized the core action of human beings, and all beings for that matter, is to be happy.

Think about the animals and insects. They mainly do what is necessary for survival, but in those tasks they perform, we could label it as “that is what makes them happy.” Human beings have that survival tendency too, often referred to as the *fight or flight* in Western

psychology. If you are not familiar with this fight or flight concept, it is how humans tend to respond to adverse situations. Very quickly the mind assesses the situation and having done so, the brain puts out signals if the person should “fight” the situation, the object, the person, or take “flight,” meaning run away or back off. It is a biological process that we all have and its main function is for our survival as a species. But we also have a conceptual mind and are able to make connections between our thoughts and emotions and go beyond just mere survival. In this way, happiness takes on a whole new dimension. It brings to light an intricate web of thought processes and patterns that will help us understand exactly what happiness is and why it is something necessary in our life.

Have you ever noticed a spider's web? It is an

*The problem is that unlike the spider's web, our happiness “web” cannot support the constant demands of our mind, for more happiness—for more and more and more. Right?*

amazing sight. There are so many threads crossing each other in mostly a geometric pattern. It is light and wispy, yet strong enough to support the spider's weight and that of its prey. Like a spider web, we complicate the idea of happiness, threading one idea over another—over and over again until eventually our “web” of happiness is complete. The problem is that unlike the spider's web, our happiness “web” cannot support the constant demands of our mind for more happiness—for more and more and more. Right? You get the house, but then the furniture isn't right; you get the furniture, but the landscaping isn't right or the walls need to be painted, or there are the bills to pay from all those goods purchased. It is nonstop demands. It would be like if the spider's web caught prey after prey, yet the spider never ate any of them and just kept collecting insect after insect. What would happen to the web?

Eventually it would get out of balance, the weight of the insect collection would tear apart the web and the spider would have to start all over again. In the same way our mind, in its infinite capacity to

create, demands more and more, yet never settles on the ones already “caught.” So we find ourselves in a perpetual cycle of getting things that seem to make us happy, only to have our web of happiness tore down and then we have to rebuild another one. Over and over again, throughout our lives this happens. And it's not just material things. It could be relationship demands, or even sometimes we see people constantly searching for the right spiritual or religious group to join. Whatever the “thing” is, it continues on and on, like the Energizer Bunny.

Have you ever seen those Energizer battery commercials? They were the ones with a pink toy bunny that moved around the floor and played the drums; it could move around because it was powered by batteries. The batteries were so strong that the bunny kept “going and going,” never stopping—or so the commercial made you think. So they called it the *Energizer Bunny*. That is how our minds work: just a super strong battery moving us on and on towards this thing called happiness.

What the Buddha realized was that the problem was not happiness, but in how

people sought out their happiness. So what is the problem? If you stop and think about all the things that might make you happy, you can see that all things we attach to for happiness are basically impermanent. They are things that are born, that age, that get sick, and eventually die. They are built, manufactured, used, break down, fall apart, and destroyed. They are things that are near us, become close to us, and move away. There are many examples of anything from living to nonliving and we can pinpoint them all to this impermanent nature. And you can also stop and see that anything that makes us happy is something that we cling on to. We want them to stay around for the long haul, right? We don't want those “happy” things to disappear or leave us.

So, what happens? The very things that make us happy end up making us miserable. It's ironic isn't it? After all, we never stop to think that happiness can lead to sadness. The Buddha said because we hold on to impermanence, we find suffering.

So what's his solution? What can we do to find happiness that isn't impermanent?

The core of Buddhism is to avoid evil, do good, and purify the mind. These three teachings are primarily to cultivate the happiness. Let's think about it: If we are able to avoid those things for which we feel regret or remorse afterwards, then our mind is clear and free from those negative consequences. Have you ever noticed how you feel after an argument with your spouse or a friend? Maybe you said something judgmental or out of anger and later you regretted it. Or you felt bad. Or maybe you were still ticked off, but the instant replay of who said what keeps going on in your head over and over again. Those consequences aren't pleasant and prohibit us from experiencing the happiness. So avoid evil is one.

On the other hand, when we do good, say help our neighbor or write a paper for a friend, we are cultivating some goodness within and we have pleasant consequences. We have a light feeling inside and a smile across our face. Good wholesome acts not only help us, they help others around us, our immediate friends and family, our community, our nation, or even our planet. It is a way of giving back, and in this giving back we are able to release ourselves,

even if temporarily, from the ingrained habitual thinking of self, individual, and separateness of others. It helps connect us with others in a selfless way. Do good deeds throughout your life, no matter if they are big or small, or in between, just take time, make that commitment, to do good for yourself and others. This is the second way to experience happiness during this life.

Purifying the mind is another dimension of how one's mental disposition can lead to positive outcomes. In purifying the mind we have to also understand the mind/body relationship. The Buddha spoke about various ways lay people can find happiness in their daily living. Practicing things like faith, virtue, generosity, and developing wisdom about the true nature of this world and ourselves, we mentally train ourselves into uplifting the good deeds in speech and body and shedding those deeds that cause mental anguish. We have a pure or, hopefully at least, a purer mind. This purity of mind is the third way of experiencing happiness.

The Buddha described these three aspects of life: do good, avoid evil, and purify the mind, and realized that if he could overcome the negative tendencies and promote

the positive, his overall life would be pleasant and happy. He would not be blamed by others, he would not blame himself. Regret would cease to exist because he would have managed his mind, body, and speech appropriately. He would not have lit any fire that did not need to be lit. In this way, he would remain innocent and unspoiled.

So I ask you: what is happiness? Happiness is being content with what comes your way, but allowing it to pass when that time comes. It is about developing qualities that promote overall well-being, mentally healthy characteristics that empower us to make the most of our situations. It is about attitude—an attitude directed towards wisdom of life. It is about letting go, acceptance, forgiveness, and above all, love. During your drive home today, see if you can find a moment to experience the true happiness described by the Buddha. May we all find happiness within. 🌸

# The Secret on Top of the Hill

by Denise VanVliet



**M**y name is Denise. First of all, I am nobody. I am just like you, and I am you. This information could have easily come to you.

As a cancer survivor, I started a journey of spiritual seeking. I knew up to the point that I got cancer that what I was doing on my path was not working. My studies of metaphysics, the law of attraction, and psychic development got me to a point. I knew there was more. So I started asking my higher self.

For our 25<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary, my husband and I decided to go to Ireland on a spiritual quest. We went with four other women. One of the women had lived in Ireland during summer vacations while growing up with her family. Another is a wonderful woman who brings groups of six or so on guided tours of many of the sacred places in Ireland. We were there for about ten days. It was nice going over to another country with someone that was pretty much our tour guide.

On our last day, we visited another sacred site northwest of Dublin, near Kells. The place is called Lough Crew, also known as the *Hill of the Witch*. The energy that day from the moment I woke up was very strong; I could not even eat my breakfast that morning. The lady of the Bed and Breakfast we stayed at made such a beautiful traditional Irish breakfast and I felt bad for not being able to eat.

We arrived at the big hill that we had to climb up. As we were going up this hill, I could feel weird things going on in my body. I could see up the hill and thought that I really needed to be there. One girl was already up on top of the hill, and as I was looking up at her, I could see her hair literally

standing straight up! I yelled, “Look at your hair!” She pointed right at me and yelled, “Look at *your* hair!” My husband was running up the hill holding his face and saying, “What is going on with my face?” The energy on this hill was just so powerful. I stayed on the top of the hill and just took in the energy.

Our tour guide suggested that we give an offering to the witch. We stood in a semicircle in front of the altar. We each took a turn at making an offering. When it was my turn, I prayed for forgiveness and awakening and then took a drink of the offering.

When we turned around to leave, it seems I fell to the ground. Now if you ask my husband what happened, he would tell you that I had a seizure. To me I had a very profound spiritual experience. Now I have never had seizures in the past and I have not had seizures since. Something that day changed within me. I have not been the same since.

Three days later, we were home. During my daily meditation, I had an out-of-body experience. I had a vivid vision and I saw this beautiful totem. I did not know at the time what it meant; I knew only that it had to be drawn. My daughter is the artist in the family, so I described what I saw in my vision and she took my verbal explanation and made the most beautiful visual representation of what I saw.

Three days later, again while in meditation, the totem’s meaning began to come to me. So much information was flowing through me that I could barely keep up with writing it all down. What I realized I had and what happened to me over the last few days was amazing. I realized that it was three days after my spiritual experience in Ireland that I had the vision of the totem. It was three days after

the vision that all the information about what I saw came flowing through me. The totem has three animals on it—I started to see a pattern. The pattern I saw was the number three.



What I learned from what I thought was my totem was the importance of the number three. This information felt like it had been kept secret for a long time. But then again, nothing is secret. I had an urge to look up the word secret in the Irish language or Gaelic. All of this seemed to come from that place where I had my experience in Ireland. The word for secret is *rúnda* with an accent on the letter *u*. So *Rúnda 3*, to me, means the secret of the three levels of consciousness.

When I started writing down what was flowing through me, I asked, *why three?* The answer I received is, *because we are three-dimensional beings*. We must understand where we are in order to move forward to our next stage of consciousness. That meant to me that this information was not just for me. The animal totems were not just mine as I originally thought: they are everyone's totems. They are IN each and every one of us. They ARE each and every one of us.

This was the next logical step in my understanding of who we are and where we are going. This was the answer I have been searching for. I arrived at a point in my studies of metaphysics where I began wondering what was missing. I started asking myself or the Universe what it was that was missing. As a spiritual counselor, intuitive, energy worker, animal communicator, body worker, and sign language interpreter, I *am* a communicator. That is my gift. I do feel very blessed to have had this information flow through me and I am humbled to be able to share it with anyone who is ready, just as I was, to take that next logical step in understanding the Three Levels of Consciousness.

If you notice the picture of the totem, they represent the three levels of consciousness. The wolf is our conscious self. This is where the ego resides. He tells me not to be afraid of him or the ego. He is our cunning and planning self. He thinks fast on his feet, always looking ahead and preparing for the future. He also tells me that most are a slave to him. He has become the ruler of the Three. But he wants and needs to be trained and used for the highest good. So ask your inner wolf; are you a slave to your wolf, or do you train your conscious self to serve your highest good?

Then we have the rat. The rat represents our subconscious self. It is blind and believes *everything* the wolf tells it. It is also connected to every rat on the planet. The rat knows only right *now*. You cannot talk to the rat about the past or future. The rat is what Carl Jung refers to as the *collective unconscious* or what Eckhart Tolle calls the *pain body*. This is where we are all connected.

Next is the hawk. The hawk has only one eye; the third eye. It represents our higher self. The message from the hawk is to not limit ourselves. We are so full of emotions and beliefs that no longer serve us. It's like we've become so afraid to soar—too heavy to soar with all that we attach to. Take flight and be open to the possibilities. If you notice, the hawk and the rat are directly connected. It is the wolf that creates duality.

*The animal totems were not just mine as I originally thought: they are everyone's totems. They are IN each and every one of us. They ARE each and every one of us.*

It all became very clear to me! It's amazing what the universe will reveal to you when you ask and then open yourself up for the answers. It's the secret of three!

In the practitioner class that has developed from all of this, we talk a lot about the subconscious and, just as the Buddha taught, how we hold onto our emotions, or our attachments to them, can cause a great deal of suffering. Our suffering comes from inside ourselves. It's not so much what we see going on in the illusory world. The visual that came to me was of the rat in the ocean trying to hold these large beach balls down under the water. The beach balls represent the emotions and thoughts that we suppress. Holding down these beach balls requires a great deal of energy—energy that can be released to the hawk and used for our highest good.

We open up communication with our higher self when we release these beach balls. We go through exercises to release this energy, no longer suppressing our emotions. Releasing this energy to the higher self brings about a feeling of bliss. As we release these thoughts and emotions, we become more and more *awake*. That is the gift. We begin to see the illusion of it all. These suppressed emotions can be anything, such as memories we've attached emotions to. Each time we remember the memory, it's as if it's happening right now (remembering that the rat only knows *right now*). When we do the exercises, we release the emotional charge attached to the memory. It's very freeing.

If you notice in the picture of the totem, the rat is reaching up to the wolf. The wolf is barely connecting to the rat and there is no connection at all between the wolf and the hawk. There is a direct connection with the rat to the hawk. The rat wants to connect with the wolf. The rat and the hawk are one. It is the wolf that ignores the rat and the hawk, thinking he is separate.

This information over time has evolved and has taken on a life of its own. There is so much more to the *Runda 3* practitioner class. I am forever grateful that this experience came through me. What a wonderful blessing and journey it has been. ❖

To learn more about Denise, visit her website at <http://www.runda3.com>.

# A Chat with Diana

by Pam Larson



I think that it is important to connect with members of the Sangha and learn more about each other. Many are involved in things that are so very helpful and loving. One of those people is Diana Schuster, long time Blue Lotus member and creator of *EnergyInfusion*, her own work and practice that she has developed to help others find inner peace and love. I find Diana to be so delightful and full of love and sweetness. I hope that you will enjoy this little chat with her.

## PAM LARSON: TELL US ABOUT HOW YOU CAME TO BE INVOLVED WITH THE BLUE LOTUS TEMPLE.

Diana Schuster: About 6–7 years ago, there was a “Change your Mind” program on the [Woodstock, IL] square on a very hot summer day. I wasn’t living up here yet. My daughter and I came up here for it. Part way through, we noticed that the sky was turning black. And all of a sudden the sky opened up. People scattered and I went into the gazebo. Bhante Sujatha, who I didn’t know yet, was sitting there and I said “So what’s your take on this sudden rainstorm?” He said, “To teach us impermanence.” He planted a seed at that moment.

## TELL US ABOUT TAKING YOUR BODHISATTVA VOWS.

This was the first year that Bhante Sujatha had offered this. About six months prior to that, I offered out in one of my meditations that I was ready for more precepts. I didn’t know what vows or precepts, but I knew I wanted to take more steps on my path to enlightenment. So when he offered them, it was like, “*Thank you!*” I embraced them fully. It’s a deepening connection to being even more mindful and it fits into the parameters of accountability that I have set for myself.

## HOW ARE THESE VOWS ADAPTED FOR OUR WESTERN CULTURE?

I weave these vows into my life, for my culture. I am not a nun and I am not a monk. I didn’t sign up for that. But I did take the vows with the notion of detaching. I live with comfort, but I can say, “I will give this to you now, it’s yours, take it. I am ok with this being removed from me. I don’t grasp.”

## HOW LONG HAVE YOU WORKED AS A HOSPICE PATIENT CARE VOLUNTEER?

Almost three years.

## TELL US WHAT IT’S LIKE ON A PERSONAL LEVEL TO COME INTO THE LAST PHASE OF SOMEONE’S LIFE.

It is an honor and a privilege to be possibly the last new person that someone will meet in their life. So it is a big responsibility to nurture that heart space, to honor it, to help heal it. They are often carrying a heaviness and a need to forgive. I do it with great respect.



Diana Schuster of EnergyInfusion

**TELL US ABOUT ENERGYINFUSION.**

*EnergyInfusion* is a blend of powerful modalities. Meditation, visualization, breath awareness (pranayama), and energy healing (Reiki). Reiki is healing through universal love and energy. And I use intuitive healing. I'm guided by spirit and I listen to what it is in my client's highest good. What my desire for people to gain from this is a sense of calmness, health, and release of what's no longer serving them. They can live in light and love and joy.

All of the questions that you have asked encompass my life: the Buddha, hospice, EnergyInfusion. When people ask, "What do you do for work and what do you do for fun? I describe that everything I do is my work and everything I do, I do for joy. EnergyInfusion is my life's work. You are experiencing it for yourself; it is liberating. The lightness brings mindfulness, the mindfulness brings clarity, and clarity brings joy. ❁

*To learn more about Diana and EnergyInfusion, visit her website at <http://www.energyinfusion.biz>*



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Artist: Kaya Tallman, Age 5



CHANGE OF SEASONS  
Artist: Cadence Carpenter, Age 5



HAWAIIAN SEA TURTLE  
Photographer: Pamela Stanley



SERENITY NOW!

Photographer: John Stanley "Taken from my backyard pond with my iPhone camera."