

Three Jewels

QUARTERLY: MAY—JULY 2012
WWW.BLUELOTUSTEMPLE.ORG

THE NEWSLETTER OF BLUE LOTUS BUDDHIST TEMPLE

SO MUCH TO CELEBRATE: SATURDAY, MAY 26, 2012 3-6 PM

Vesakha Puja Day
BUDDHA DAY

OPENING CEREMONIES FOR THE

New Home of Blue Lotus Temple

Bhante Sujatha's 10th Anniversary
CREATING THE BLUE LOTUS SANGHA

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

FROM THE EDITOR | MESSAGE FROM THE ABBOT | ARTICLES OF INSPIRATION & MORE!



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MAY-JULY 2012

2 FROM THE EDITOR

5 A MESSAGE FROM THE ABBOT

8 FROM OUR SANGHA

SEND US YOUR THOUGHTS, ANNOUNCEMENTS, ARTICLES & ART!
DEADLINE FOR THE UPCOMING ISSUE IS JULY 2, 2012.

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Dear Blue Lotus Community and Friends—

This newsletter is going to layout just one week before our Vesakha Puja (Buddha Day) Celebration, and we are also offering the new Dhamma Hall and

Temple at the same time. If that isn't enough good news and excitement, we will also be celebrating Bhante Sujatha's 10th anniversary as the founder of the Blue Lotus community.

As you can imagine, there is no end to the preparation and rehearsal and organization going on around the Temple these days. And at the same time, we are seeing many other changes in our community—friends retiring and moving away from the area, students graduating and moving away from home or into new careers, new faces joining us as we continue to grow and to expand the classes and groups we can offer in our new space.

This all makes it hard to know when to stop adding material to the newsletter! When I thought I was ready to send it off to my partner, designer Bibi Dowell, I heard of more news and felt torn to stop the presses (although there are no presses...) and hunt down details, but had to decide that "enough is enough," and let it be for this issue.

With all the activity at the temple, including construction workers hammering and buzzing away day and night to complete the transformation from a Unitarian Sanctuary to a Buddhist Dhamma Hall, there are stressful moments. Let me be more honest, there are stressful hours. This morning, as I listened to podcast talks by Tara Brach (tarabrach.com), I found two new (to me) talks on Stress and Meditation, Parts 1 and 2. Of course, they were exactly what I needed to hear to help me find my breath and come back to the present moment. She reminds me that when we become stressed we have lost the feeling of spaciousness and our connection and interdependence with all of the world. (Thich Nhat Hanh calls this connection "interbeing.") We become locked into

our little selves, tight and isolated. Suffocated. This beautiful poem by Judy Brown speaks to this spaciousness and how to maintain it.

May you breathe in and out, filling yourself with the peace of spaciousness.

—*Bhikkhuni Vimala*

Fire by Judy Brown

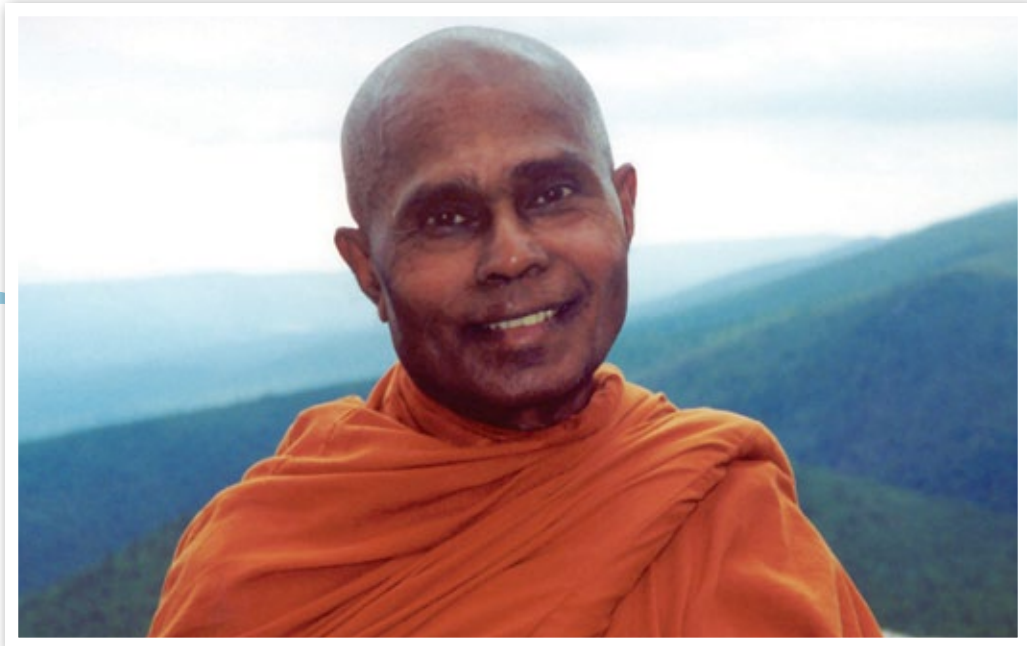
*What makes a fire burn
is space between the logs,
a breathing space.
Too much of a good thing,
too many logs
packed in too tight
can douse the flames
almost as surely
as a pail of water would.
So building fires
requires attention
to the spaces in between,
as much as to the wood.
When we are able to build
open spaces
in the same way
we have learned
to pile on the logs,
then we can come to see how
it is fuel, and absence of the fuel
together, that make fire possible.
We only need to lay a log
lightly from time to time.
A fire
grows
simply because the space is there,
with openings
in which the flame
that knows just how it wants to burn
can find its way. ♡*

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

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

*Most Venerable Senior Monk
of the United States to Visit Blue Lotus*

SPECIAL SERVICE WITH BHANTE G ON SUNDAY, MAY 27



The Most Venerable Bhante Dr. Henepola Gunaratana will lead a special meditation and dhamma talk on Sunday afternoon, May 27, from 2 to 4 p.m., at the new Dhamma Hall of Blue Lotus Temple.

Bhante Gunaratana, or “Bhante G” as he is known throughout the world, will be the Officiate of Blue Lotus Temple’s Opening Ceremony and Vesakha Day Celebration on May 26, 2012. He is the Chief Sangha Nayaka Thera for North America, and the founding Abbot of the Bhavana Society in West Virginia.

Among the many books he has written, Bhante G is also the author of *Mindfulness in Plain English*. This bestseller is the book Bhante Sujatha recommends to anyone interested

in meditation, and he considers it the “Blue Lotus Temple meditation manual.” Bhante G also compiled the *Bhavana Vandana*, a definitive collection of daily devotions used by monastics and lay meditators as well. The collection includes beautiful English translations and a Pali pronunciation guide that we use here at Blue Lotus Temple.

It is truly a privilege and honor to have Bhante G leading and teaching us in our newly blessed Dhamma Hall. Please consider attending this event as part of your Vesakha Puja weekend. It will be a lovely balance to the activity of the preceding day, with all of the hustle and bustle of the Buddha Day celebrations and parade! ♥

To help cover Bhante G’s travel expenses, the Blue Lotus Temple is asking a minimum donation of \$10 for this service, but no one will be turned away. Bhante G has also agreed to sign any of his books that you have and want to bring to this service, and we will also have a limited number of his books for purchase at this event. Our bookstore and gift shop will be open before and after the service.

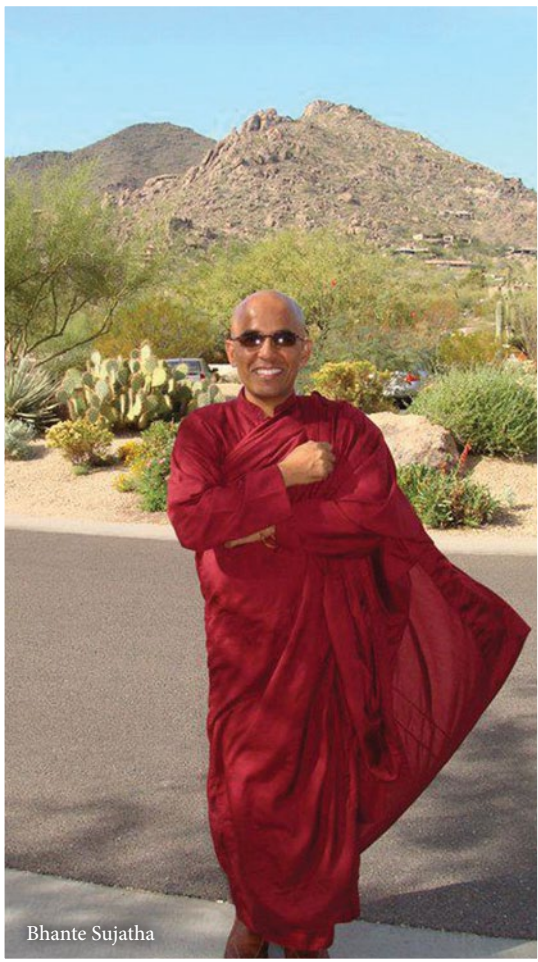
MAY YOU BE WELL, HAPPY, AND PEACEFUL

Baby Blessing



On April 21, Baby Theo was welcomed into the Blue Lotus Community and given a blessing by Bhante Sujatha and the monastics of Blue Lotus. Mom and dad are Shanna Gordon and O'Bryan Kumbirai Bvute. ❁

THE PATH



Bhante Sujatha

Since the inception of the Blue Lotus Temple 10 years ago, our joint goal has been to create a space for self liberation. This is the type of liberation and freedom that comes from the journey inward, without restrictions.

Many things have been changing around the temple. The growth continues to be amazing. What the Buddha said about the Middle Path is that it produces knowledge—leading to calm, to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, then to Unbinding. This is known as the Noble Eightfold Path: right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. We have continued this path.

The Path of the Blue Lotus Temple is growing—full of meaning and interpretations within this Noble Eightfold Path. Let me mention a few of these here. The temple could not have reached this milestone without right view: understanding what the needs of the community were, then presenting them an offering or solution to meet that need.

With right resolve we have come to this place of humility and grace. The passion and energy is where it is supposed to be to get us here. With right speech we have nurtured the Buddha nature within each other and within the community. Now and forever this will help us grow.

Right action is one of the largest areas where I see growth. The lay sangha here at the temple continues to grow and prosper, and that is only accomplished through diligence and this right action. The continued practice by each member is reflected in the selfless services provided. For instance, along with the opening of the new Temple and Dhamma Hall, we are also welcoming the selfless service of the new Blue Lotus Prison Sangha (BLPS).

I am grateful for this group of volunteers who want to provide help by sharing the Dhamma and their spiritual connection with men and women who have become the outcasts of our society. The only solution ever given to them was to place them in a prison complex that is more punitive than rehabilitative. The fact remains that they are human beings and are starved for the practical teachings of the Dhamma. When our BLPS share their stories, the hope is that the comfort of a caring member of Blue Lotus Temple can help with the loneliness of prison life. Spiritual communications are essential in any rehabilitation process.

MAY YOU BE WELL, HAPPY, AND PEACEFUL. ♥

Book Review: Colorful Realm

by Tod Nielsen

Attention, art lovers, Buddhists, and lovers of Buddhist art. This book is meant for you!

The Japanese painter Ito Jakuchu (Ito is the family name) was born in 1716 to a green grocer family in Kyoto. He ran the family business until he was 40 years old, at which time he turned the reins over to his younger brother and began painting full time. Jakuchu was a close friend of many of Kyoto's monastic Sangha.

Most of us are familiar with the Buddhist concept of the Six Realms of Existence: the two heavenly realms; the hell realm; the realm of hungry ghosts; the human realm; and lastly, the animal realm. Jakuchu painted a series of thirty scrolls that celebrate the colorful diversity that exists in the animal realm. Jakuchu also painted a copy of a (probably Chinese) triptych comprised of Buddha Shakyamuni flanked by the Bodhisattvas Manjushri and Samantabhadra.

The thirty three scrolls were created over a span of ten years: 1757 to 1767. They are considered to be one of the greatest achievements in the history of Japanese art. "Enlivened by his hand, his paintings are filled with a mysterious spirit." These words were inscribed by the monk Baisa'o in a calligraphy scroll in 1760, upon encountering the *Colorful Realm of Living Beings*.

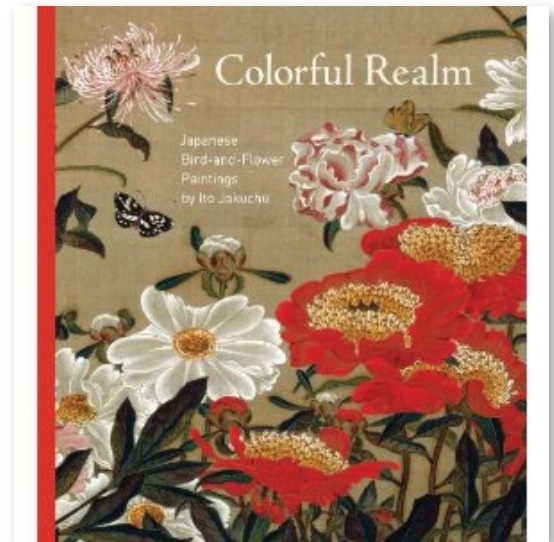
Jakuchu donated the *Colorful Realm* to the main Zen temple and monastery in Kyoto—the Shokokuji—where the series was displayed in the Abbot's Main Hall during important religious ceremonies

and the annual "Airing of the Temple's Treasures." The scrolls are arranged so that they flank the triptych and the animals appear to be attending the Buddha's teachings, as recounted in the Lotus Sutra.

What were Jakuchu's motivation and purpose? This excerpt explains:

Jakuchu came to fully appreciate the significance and innate beauty of all sentient things in the natural world. And in this vein he conceived of depicting a radiant gathering of myriad living creatures before the Buddha... Jakuchu's attention to the minutiae of color may have been a manifestation of his compassion for living creatures and religiosity, for Colorful Realm was not merely a set of bird-and-flower paintings, but rather a series of Buddhist paintings in which the artist attempted to depict the inner essence of the natural world as beautifully as possible... Nature is depicted in its full glory, with strong and weak, large and small, beautiful and ugly given equal measure. Jakuchu appears to be a particularly strong advocate of the smallest creatures, such as grasshoppers, which radiate life and energy.

Although the earlier paintings in the series closely follow classical antecedents, the later paintings more and more reflect Jakuchu's free spirit, until they become almost psychedelic! For instance, in the 24th scroll, "Shells," the unbelievably



detailed shells are scattered over an impossible seascape of meandering streams and curling waves. Jakuchu's technical virtuosity is truly amazing. He painted on both sides of the translucent silk medium in order to create his beautiful effects. The scrolls must be even more amazing when seen in person.

The book itself is flawlessly printed and contains a full-page print and many close-ups of each scroll. There are also essays on the history of the scrolls, their influence on subsequent art, the ritual context, and others. An essay on the conservation and restoration of the scrolls is particularly fascinating.

If you are at all interested in Buddhist art, this is a must have book. Just be sure you have a great deal of time and a magnifying glass—you'll spend hours with this book! Highly recommended. ♥

Tod Nielsen studied thangka painting under Ang Tsherin Sherpa in San Francisco. Tod lives in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin.

COLORFUL REALM: Japanese Bird-and-Flower Paintings by Ito Jakuchu.

By Yukio Lippit, et al. ISBN: 978-0-226-48460-0

Vesakha Holiday 2012 in Sri Lanka

Vesakha is an annual public holiday observed traditionally by practicing Buddhists in South Asian and Southeast Asian countries like Nepal, Singapore, Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Indonesia, Pakistan and India. Sometimes informally called “Buddha’s Birthday,” it actually encompasses the birth, enlightenment (Nirvana), and passing (Parinirvana) of Gautama Buddha.

In Sri Lanka, the Vesakha Day Festival is celebrated as a religious and cultural festival on the full moon of the month of May for two days. In Sri Lanka, Vesakha 2012 will be celebrated from Saturday, May 5, to Sunday, May 6.

During these two days, the selling of alcohol and flesh is prohibited by government decree. As a symbolic act of liberation, birds, insects and animals are released in huge numbers. Celebrations include various religious and alms-giving activities.

Electrically lit pandols, called toranas, are erected in various locations in Colombo, Kandy, and villages all around the country, most

sponsored by donors, religious societies and welfare groups. Each pandol illustrates a story from the 550 *Jataka Katha* or the 550 Past Life Stories of the Buddha.

In addition, colorful lanterns called Vesak *koodu* are hung along streets and in front of homes. They signify the light of the Buddha, Dhamma and the Sangha.

Many devout Buddhists wear simple white dresses on Vesakha Day and spend the whole day in temples with renewed determination to observe the observance of the Eight Precepts of Buddhism.

Vesak celebration also means making special efforts to bring happiness to the people in more straightened circumstances. Food stalls set up by Buddhist devotees called *dansälas* provide free food and drinks to passersby. Groups of people from various community organizations, businesses and government departments sing *bhakti gee*, or Buddhist devotional songs. Colombo and Kandy experience a massive influx of visitors from all parts of the country during this week. ❁

Life with Bhante



The Blue Lotus Board of Directors, 2012, include: (front row, from left) Guy Spinelli, vice president; Ven. Bhante Sujatha, patron; Glen Ebey, president; (back row, from left) Julie Gibson, director; Bill Reddy, treasurer; Nancy Schwab, secretary; Kristin Hannah-Waspi, director; Brian Waspi, director.

By Nancy Schwab, Secretary of the Blue Lotus, Board of Directors since 2005

I remember meeting Bhante Sujatha at the Unitarian Church in 2004 for the first time. From that first contact, I knew this was someone I wanted to know better and that he had something to share with me.

That's when I began attending Saturday meditation practice in the basement of the church. It brought a semblance of calm, peacefulness, and focus to my life. And it still does. It helps me put my life in perspective when it seems out of control.

It is a challenge to prioritize and practice daily. But I can see a positive difference in my mood, actions and world view if I am consistent.

Over the years, I've taken part in retreats, gong baths, movie nights, Bingo, book studies, discussion groups, and

all our special events. My wish for the future is to continue to be enriched by the dharma teachings and the wonderful sangha that is the Blue Lotus Temple.

Since November, 2005, I have been the secretary of the Blue Lotus Buddhist Temple, seeing it go through so many changes and so much growth.

A highlight of my life was making a trip to Sri Lanka with Bhante Sujatha and six others in 2006. Those are cherished memories.

It has been a blessing to be part of the recent growth and acquisition of a new home for our Temple. And it has been a blessing to work with my teacher and friend, Bhante Sujatha, through these "early" years of Blue Lotus. ❀

By Julie Gibson, Board of Directors, Director since 2008

"Hmmm, this little man is telling me to sit silently with a bunch of people I don't know, forget the others around me, focus my attention on my little ol' breath (when half the time I forget it's even there), and become aware that this is the path to...? Why did I come here, to the Blue Lotus Temple in a town I just moved to and where I know no one?"

It is an interesting question after being a member of Blue Lotus Temple (BLT) for almost eight years. Interesting because, for me, the transition from curious to committed has been organic, subtle, and profound. A practice that once made my foot fall asleep has become an essential part of my life, a very practical tool.

And I am not alone. In the last ten years since Bhante

Sujatha's arrival in Woodstock, the BLT has gone from six members to a few hundred members. The original offerings of twice weekly community meditations lead by a monk or nun on Mondays at 7 p.m. and Saturdays at 10 a.m. continues, and they are now joined by the following:

- Buddha Kids
- Buddha Youth
- Sutta Study (Buddha's teachings)
- Book Group
- Yoga
- Taste of Sri Lanka dinner and Breakfast in Sri Lanka
- Prison Outreach
- Gong Baths
- Meditation Retreats
- Introduction to Buddhism Class
- Chanting
- Vesakha Day Celebration and procession around Woodstock Square (All are welcome May 26, 2012, 3 p.m.)
- Blue Lotus groups started by Bhante Sujatha in Nevada, Arizona, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. (Check out BlueLotusTemple.org and you'll see what I mean!)

So what gives? Why have people in McHenry County and

beyond responded to this mindfulness meditation practice? The monastics teach how to meditate, but the response for each of us is very personal.

In general, Buddha spoke about how meditation allows us to be awake and aware of the moments of this life as we live them. It is trippy to recognize that the Sun is our energy source fueling each little breath almost like a wireless modem supplies a laptop. That little breath, miraculous in its own right, is the reminder of the now.

When I sit on the cushion, focus on my breath, and practice non-judgment (sometimes a few seconds of a 30-minute sit, sometimes more), I do become aware. I become aware in a way I don't when I am engaged in activity. I become aware of being alive. It makes me smile to think of it because this small gesture, both mundane and overt, has increased the size of my heart.

And that is why I come to BLT, not because it is easy but because the practice and the community allow me to sit quietly and just be. 🌸

Mindful Eating as Food for Thought

(This is an excerpt from the article by Jeff Gordinier, NYTimes.com, February 7, 2012)

WHEN YOU EAT, JUST EAT Unplug the electronics. For now, at least, focus on the food.

CONSIDER SILENCE Avoiding chatter for 30 minutes might be impossible in some families, especially with young children, but specialists suggest that greenhorns start with short periods of quiet.

TRY IT WEEKLY Sometimes there's no way to avoid wolfing down onion rings in your cubicle. But if you set aside one sit-down meal a week as an experiment in mindfulness, the insights may influence everything else you do.

PLANT A GARDEN, AND COOK Anything that reconnects you with the process of creating food will magnify your mindfulness.

CHEW PATIENTLY It's not easy, but try to slow down, aiming for 25 to 30 chews for each mouthful.

USE FLOWERS AND CANDLES Put them on the table before dinner. Rituals that create a serene environment help foster what one advocate calls "that moment of gratitude."

FIND A BUDDHIST CONGREGATION where the community practices mindfulness.

Editor's note: Try Blue Lotus Temple in Woodstock, IL www.bluelotustemple.org. 🌸

A More Positive Pen

by Courtenay Hill Wilson



Long before meeting Bhante Sujatha six years ago, I loved The Dhammapada and thought of it as a handbook for living a good life. Of course, at that time I was uninstructed in how to use the gems of wisdom I found in each passage, but I felt I was certainly onto something.

Now as a student of Bhante’s for a while, I am able to clearly isolate my “trouble spots,” especially since taking the Five Precepts. Perhaps I felt that my issues would vanish in a properly spiritual manner, with mystical ease. This, of course, doesn’t happen; I merely see more clearly my mind’s weak points as though a powerful candle was lit for me in a dark room. Meditation hands me the tools needed to tweak these weak points, but for a while the same Dhammapada passages continued to bother me. Here is an example:

*The wise are controlled in bodily action,
Controlled in speech and controlled in thought.
They are truly well-controlled.*

—Dhammapada 17.234

My issues aren’t about controlling my actions. I simply “look before I leap,” examining what I am about to do and asking myself if it’s a noble or “wise” thing to do. The phrase “*What Would Bhante Do*” is a mantra of mine. If I do my best and treat others as I would want to be treated, then worries cease about my actions.

Being controlled in speech is a bit more challenging as it is inevitable that a perfect audience for a juicy piece of gossip will arise, or there will be a very tempting opportunity to put an irritating person in his or her place. But again, if I wait a couple of beats I can usually control what actually comes out of my mouth. By picturing the consequences of whatever is about to be blurted out, I can decide if the “thing” is worth saying. Sometimes it is, but for the most part silence is better, or a trade for something a little more constructive.

My Waterloo has always been the “controlled in thought” part. I don’t need a powerful candle to point out my penchant for negative thinking—an almost superstitious

nature to think the worst, in case the worst actually happens. I examine something for its negative qualities before its positive ones. But worst of all, I have a talent for instantly imagining biting and nasty comments to make in a conversation, and even find secret humor in it.

This “dark side” really worried me, with the fear that something was wrong with me beyond repair or hope. I’ve truly suffered over this, feeling like some sort of impostor during meditation practice. If “the wise” are “controlled in thought,” then I must be completely the opposite--some kind of ignorant buffoon with wild, feral, out-of-control thoughts. What finally helped me began as a negative action, to prove that my thoughts were certainly not controlled. But it quickly turned into a positive experience, more like a 120-watt bulb than a powerful candle.

I re-read my journals.

Since the Easter Sunday of my seventh year, I have kept a journal. My diary was a gift from the Easter Bunny, and it included a fountain pen. My very first entry was a complaint that it was “snowing big things of snow.” (At seven, my descriptions were limited to the words I knew how to spell.) Most of the other entries recorded sad times or traumas, even the death of my best friend.

As my journals evolved, I still saw them as a place to lodge complaints, to write out satisfying scenarios of “what I SHOULD have said,” to write nasty descriptions of people I found offensive. In short, I saw them as a purging place, and in re-reading them I could see how my thoughts were so automatically negative. I rarely recounted any of the good things that happened to me or tried to put a positive spin on anything that happened. This discovery was illuminating and gave me an idea: I would do things backwards.

To do things backwards, I began by writing about only the nice parts of my day and noting only good things about

friends, family, and people I encountered. At first this was more of a challenge than one might think. My outlet for spewing out the ugly things was gone. But slowly I could see something emerge that was rather miraculous to me.

I discovered there were actually more good things to jot down than bad, however minor. It could be an offhand comment made by a stranger that made me feel good, or a description of how my favorite tree looked against the pre-dawn sky.

Finally the whole point of my exercise became clear. I was literally retraining my automatic thoughts through my pen. Throughout the day I’d be looking for happy things to write about later, and I wasn’t paying so much attention to petty annoyances. The bigger negatives weren’t affecting me so much either, as I tried to find something, however slight, to write down about them that would shine a less dismal light on the situation.

Even during my Dad’s illness, I kept a humorous account of funny things my mom and I did to cheer him up, or poignant experiences we had at the hospital and chemo lab. I realized there was no point in highlighting the horror we felt. And as I revisit the entries now that he is in remission, what I remember are the warm and friendly people we met, and more of the hope we felt instead of the despair.

Perhaps this way to “rewire the circuits” wouldn’t work for everyone, but I believe in the power a mere pen can wield. This method is a step removed from working with a raw thought; after all, my version has to first hit paper. But the journal has become my training wheels, which, after all, exist to provide safety and to help move us forward. Training wheels aren’t considered a bad thing or cheating, they are merely a step in a challenging process. That is how I’ve come to view my journal and, now, more positive pen. 🌸

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

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. Jumping at this unusual but welcome opportunity, I said, “Sure!” Out of curiosity, I asked why she asked me. She replied they had rented a comedy and my laughter made the movie funnier. So we watched it, and I was happy to supply the laugh track.

This is an example showing 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 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. ❧

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

Wall Climbing Without Attachments

by Rev. Denise VanVliet DD



Does religion play a role in the awakening process? Many follow some form of religion and expect this religion to wake them or help in enlightenment, right? But the problem I experienced is that I had a head full of ideas and beliefs. I had ideas, knowledge, and sacred writings—what I thought was preparing me for awakening.

It was the Buddha who reminded me,

Do not believe in anything simply because you have heard it. Do not believe in anything simply because it is found written in your religious books. Do not believe in anything merely on the authority of your teacher and elders. Do not believe in traditions because they have been handed down for many generations. But after observation and analysis, when you find that anything agrees with reason and is conducive to the good and benefit of one and all, then accept it and live up to it.

What I realized I had to do was purge my mind of all the ideas and beliefs that were given to me and that I attached to as truth. You do not need to have religion or a guru or any sacred teachings to wake up. In fact, those things will hinder you from awakening. It's fine to study these things, but never study them as your truth without observation and analysis as the Buddha taught. What these teachings will do is give you something to hang on to as you're trying to go into the nothingness or the void. You cannot hang on to anything as you are falling into the void and into the annihilation of the self. When one experiences awakening, there is no self.

Have you ever seen or climbed an indoor rock climbing wall? I sometimes took my

kids to them and watched as they worked to scale the top without making mistakes and having to start over. But imagine that each of those hand and foot grips on the wall represent a belief or an idea you hang on to or have an attachment to. See how that clinging prevents you from falling into the void to experience oneness.

When you are ready to go into that void, you must let go. Every thing, every belief, every idea, and all you have ever learned needs to be questioned, challenged and mentally released. The mind needs to be stripped naked to go into the emptiness.

Then, you come to the realization that you are nothing, you have nothing to hold onto, and only then are you able to go to the center of nothingness. Be prepared for the Self to be annihilated, but also for the blissful feeling of oneness and entry into the knowingness. Knowing that you are nothing and you are everything. That is the thing with seeing and waking up. Everything becomes a beautiful contradiction because everything is true and nothing is true.

There are all kinds of processes to help you challenge your beliefs and ideas. If you are willing to put forth the effort and analyze these beliefs and ideas, the rewards are amazing. Meditation and training the mind is just one of the many processes out there. You don't have to follow someone's process. You can create your own. But you must do the work. Time and conditioning gave you the attachments you have to beliefs and ideas. It's going to take diligence to release the grip you have on them. ❧

Author of *The Way of the Modern Mystic* www.denisevanvliet.com

The Mindful I

by Rose Huegen



In many of our teachings, whether from meditation or everyday actions, we are asked to be mindful. Those who have had no exposure might wonder exactly what this means, and even those who have been practicing many years may lose sight of the meaning as we lead our worldly lives.

To be mindful is to be aware; not only of our own thoughts, words, and actions but of the cause and effect those things have in the world around us.

To be mindful is to be focused; ensuring that our efforts in all that we do are not led astray.

To be mindful is to accept things as they truly are and find joy in that truth.

To be mindful is to shrug off those things which hold us back from the rightful path of enlightenment—the tired feeling that the sense-filled world around us brings on, the shortcuts we take even when we know that they don’t work in the end.

To be mindful is to know oneself and accept that self without attachment, and in such acceptance find the love that can be shared with other beings.

To be mindful is to live in the present moment, letting the past become a fond memory and the future to arrive as it will.

To be mindful is to respect life as the gift it truly is; the chance to experience the universe from a unique perspective, separate yet never apart from all other life.

To be mindful is to look beyond the surface and find meaning in each moment, whether it brings joy or sorrow.

So this one simple word encompasses

many meanings—yet it is more than the word. To be mindful is to not see it as the word but to experience it as a way of living. It is not a path we can easily walk, nor is it a goal; it is a journey taken a single step at a time just as the Buddha took His own steps to the path of enlightenment. Each step builds upon the last and adds to the solid foundation of a rightful way of life, and each step helps to break the bonds the worldly life builds around us.

The simple beauty of the Buddhist teachings is that there is no rush to become enlightened and those who follow the path are encouraged to understand it at their own pace. It is a journey shared regardless of where you are on the path; no person is any better or worse than the next. It is a journey where you are held accountable for your evolution—where you make the choices with free will and are rewarded accordingly. There is no worrying about whether you are “doing it right.” The important part is that you are “doing” it!

I am reminded of my first thoughts about joining the chanting class when it was starting and thinking to myself, “I probably sound like a wounded screech owl” and that I should spare people the agony. I still think I sound bad, but I remind myself of what chanting is all about—the coming together of the Sangha and the respect being given to the Buddha and the lessons he shared with us. I remind myself of the peace it brings to my thoughts and the strength it can give others. That is when I realized that I was being Mindful. ❀

Wild Goose Chase

by Rose Huegen



A wild goose chase—We’ve all heard this term used to describe some unattainable goal we strive towards. It’s a very fitting description for those who seek happiness—forever striving towards something that doesn’t actually exist but we still go

to great lengths thinking the exertion of effort will somehow manage to make it appear. What is it that we are truly seeking?

The answer may be found in many parts, the first is the false belief that happiness is an externally driven emotion, that things around us will make us happy. It must be found in the new house, car, job, the high grade on an exam—perhaps even the ordination you have been seeking. If asked, many people say that things like this would make them happy. But is that actually the joy that Buddhists seek?

Or are these things that simply bring us a fleeting sense of satisfaction, a little enjoyment from the sense-filled world? That isn’t to say these sorts of things are bad or undesirable. What it does say is that they can be viewed as they truly are—enjoyed in the moment, yet never attached to, hiding true joy. We are like a house in this aspect: the more we clutter

the space with unimportant things, the less room we have for things that truly matter.

So if these things cannot bring us true happiness, what should we be looking for?

That brings me to the second part of the answer, which is: nothing. The very act of pursuing this joy ensures we will never achieve it. To pursue happiness means being focused on the future and not in the present moment. True joys are already present around us and are simply waiting to be seen and experienced.

The best way to express this is to share an example.

Think about the Saturday our community gathered together to clean the new temple right after the purchase. There were so many tasks, and some were unpleasant or difficult, yet the actual joy of the moment was the Sangha coming together to create something that was more than the sum of its parts.

There was no “self” in the tasks we shared. No one was there seeking a reward or recognition, no one person’s contribution was better than the next. It was simply an act of many hearts for the benefit of all. There was joy to be felt and shared hidden in the mundane chores of cleaning an old church to introduce it as our new temple home.

It is this subtle, ever-present joy that is already there to be felt. There is no need to seek it out—we just have to be willing to open our eyes to see it for what it truly is. ❀

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