

along the Path

Spring 2011

The Newsletter of the Mindfulness Practice Center of Fairfax

CULTIVATING AN AWAKENED MIND

by ANH-HUONG NGUYEN

In Buddhist teaching, our mind has eight levels (or eight consciousnesses). The first five are grounded in the physical senses. They are the consciousnesses that arise when our eyes see form, our ears hear sounds, our nose smells, our tongue tastes, or our skin touches something. The sixth, mind consciousness, arises when our mind perceives something. The seventh, Manas, is the part of consciousness that gives rise to and is the support of mind consciousness. The eighth, store consciousness, is the ground of the other seven consciousnesses.

The first six consciousnesses are sometimes active and sometimes at rest. Eye consciousness, for example, operates during the day but not when we are asleep, because our eyes are closed. If we are asleep and not dreaming, mind consciousness stops also. Manas, however, goes on working day and night. It is always discriminating and holding on to the object that it regards as its beloved. So Manas sometimes is given another name, the Lover.

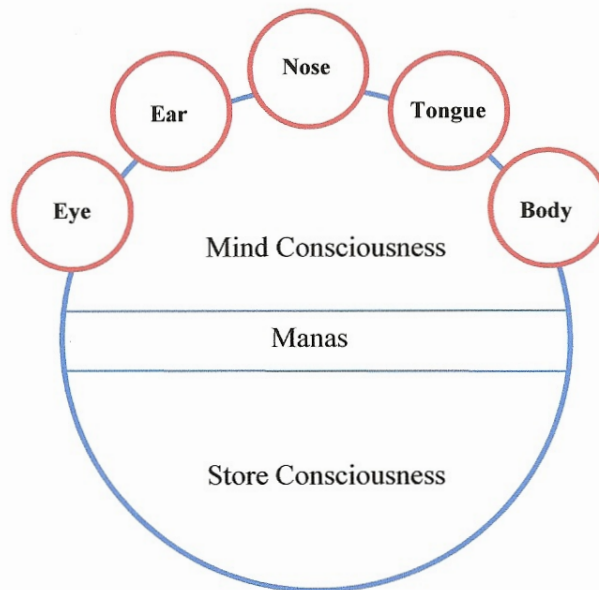
We generally believe that we understand our actions and that our actions are rational. But our emotions are often stronger than our reasoning.

Our practice is to use the energy of mindfulness to recognize and embrace tenderly any feeling, be it pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. However, when we completely identify ourselves with our feeling, we cannot take care of it. Tragically, there are some people who end their life because of very painful emotions.

When we identify ourselves with a feeling of hurt, we become the hurt and this can be very frightening. We then think, speak or act in ways to protect our hurt. Such fear-based

thoughts, words and actions create even more fear, separation, and suffering.

The work of identifying oneself with one's feeling is that of Manas. The image of a pregnant mother is sometimes used to show how Manas works. The mother identifies her baby as one with herself. In the same way, we may hold an unquestionable belief that "My feeling is mine. My feeling is me. My feeling owns my life." Manas's grip on our feelings and perceptions



The Eight Levels of Consciousness



Sangha circle of warmth and safety

prevents us from healing ourselves deeply and completely.

It is always helpful to stop, breathe and ask, “Am I only this feeling or is it just a feeling that manifests in me right now?” When I am more than my feeling, I can relax and calm it with mindful breathing and mindful walking. As with any physical or psychological phenomenon, feelings are impermanent. Each is like a drop of water in the river of feelings. Having that in mind, we are able to embrace each as it arises with the energy of mindfulness.

Also, as the fetus grows, the mother cannot eat much and gets tired easily. When we are deeply attached to blocks of hurt, fear and misperceptions, we are unable to feel love and trust in others. We become malnourished spiritually, and feel unwell both physically and

mentally. So, Manas, the Lover here, is not a true lover.

The root of Manas is delusion, the seeds of ignorance that lie deep in our store consciousness, the eighth consciousness. The highest task of mind consciousness is to shine the light of mindfulness on Manas and the seeds in our store consciousness.

The practice of stopping and resting gives us options for handling our feelings and emotions. We also practice entrusting ourselves to the Sangha's warmth and safety which can relax the grip of Manas. The Sangha's collective energy of mindfulness, concentration, and insight of interbeing is a powerful source of light. It can penetrate blocks of delusion and help them to be transformed. Delusion operates in darkness but not in light. When these blocks of ignorance are transformed, Manas is transformed.

ON HEALING

by Garrett Phelan

I have been thinking a lot about healing lately.

Healing is not necessarily curing suffering, pain, and unhappiness. How we deal with those experiences in the present moment is where healing begins. The present moment, even when it is a painful moment, holds joy.

Over the Christmas holidays, my sister was in the hospital catastrophically ill. We had no inkling of any health problems until the family gathered for the Christmas holidays and we found out that she was in severe pain. After returning from a month in India, she had been suffering acute stomach pains. By Christmas, she spent most of the day in her bedroom and was unable to eat at all. We finally convinced her to go to the emergency room that night at least to find out what was going on.

Tests administered in the emergency room Christmas night revealed that she had advanced ovarian cancer and needed immediate surgery. Forty-eight hours later, after an extensive and invasive surgical procedure, she emerged from the operation very weak.

The doctors' orders were to breathe, eat, and get up as soon as possible and walk. Her entire life was reduced to those essentials. Breathe, eat and move. Then rest. To clear her lungs and prevent fluids from building up, she had to breathe mindfully into a tube that measured the depth of her breathing. For more than a week, she was fed intravenously until she could begin eating small quantities of solid food to provide her body with nutrients and to get her digestive system working again. And finally, she was to get up with a



Spring buds, grey sky

walker and move slowly, up and down the hospital corridors, in order to build up her strength.

I most enjoyed the time just breathing with my sister. She would easily forget to use that tube, but if we did it together, she would happily do it. These were such loving moments. Walking with her was the same. We would walk slowly, mindfully around the corridors. A little bit more each day. Walking meditation.

My sister needed her family sangha for support. She needed to be encouraged to breathe slowly and deeply into that tube 6 times an hour. We had to encourage her to eat something solid in spite of the pain so her system could function again, eventually with the cessation of the pain. We would help her to get up, in spite of the discomfort, to walk slowly and not to allow the muscles to atrophy, and to stimulate all parts of the body to operate fully again. Day in, day out, 16 hours a day, for three weeks in the hospital.

In that hospital room, husband, sons, their wives, brothers, sisters-in-law -- and last but definitely not least -- grandchildren. A touch, a gentle hug, a laugh, a kiss. The sangha.

We were there for her.

Days of Mindfulness.

With my sister's illness, what I have discovered is that I have been practicing this life-giving

"breathing" for the last 12 years as mindfulness practice! I had no realization that each moment of

breathing, eating and moving mindfully is a life-giving miracle. Being present with my sister in that hospital, I became aware that the essentials to live fully are the essentials of our mindfulness practice. There is much joy in the present moment, even when it is a fearful and painful moment. I also realized that these practices were not "methods" for living happily, but living the practices *is* happiness. The MPCF's Days of Mindfulness are not practices *for* life: the practice *is* life. Breathe, eat, walk, rest, and the sangha.

I became aware that I have the ability to experience joy in each moment. It is hard work, but it is beautiful work.

Once my sister's health improved enough she began to worry about everyone else. Her children, her brothers, her grandchildren, and her husband: why we didn't go to the beach, what are the children going to do, what about the class her husband was supposed to begin teaching next week, what about insurance coverage for the lengthy hospital stay and medical expenses? We gently encouraged her to let that go and come back to the present moment and eat,

breathe, and walk mindfully in the here and now -- to come back to health.

Last week I saw a rerun of a National Geographic Special entitled "Killer Stress." It said : "*Stress. In the beginning it saved our lives. It's what made us run from predators and enabled us to take down prey. Today, humans are turning on that same life-saving stress response to cope with 30-year mortgages, four-dollar-a-gallon gas, difficult bosses and traffic jams ...*"

*Breathing in I release my worries,
Breathing out I release my thoughts.
Breathing in I touch peace,
Breathing out I touch joy*

"In its studies it found that these new stresses are self-induced.... It can shrink our brains, add fat to our bellies, even unravel our chromosomes.

When we are sick and need healing, be it physical, emotional or mental, we can reduce stress by focusing on the essentials that can bring us health and joy: breathing, eating, moving, resting and sangha.

As a Christmas present I gave my sister a handmade pocket chapbook of Thay's gathas. She told me she kept it by her side at the hospital, and now as she goes through chemo. It has brought her much comfort. The first gatha is:

*Waking up this morning, I smile.
24 brand new hours are before me.
I vow to live mindfully in each moment
And to look on all other beings with compassion.*

The last gatha is:

*Breathing in I release my worries,
Breathing out I release my thoughts.
Breathing in I touch peace,
Breathing out I touch joy*

Breathe, eat, walk, rest and enjoy sangha.

PLEASURE AND PAIN

by Joyce Bailey



Snowdrops

In mid-December of last year I got a burning, itchy rash on my body and didn't think much of it. After all, how many times have I been bitten by bugs and scratched by plants that left various rashes? Unfortunately, this turned out to be something more serious -- shingles followed by post-herpetic neuralgia -- and suddenly I became one of a small percentage of people who become severely ill from getting shingles.

For many years now I have been reciting the Five Remembrances:

I am of the nature to grow old. There is no way to escape growing old.

I am of the nature to have ill health. There is no way to escape having ill health.

I am of the nature to die. There is no way to escape death.

All that is dear to me and everyone I love is of the nature to change. There is no way to escape being separated from them.

My actions are my only true belongings. There is no way to escape the consequences of my actions. They are the ground on which I stand.

I realize now that as I reflected on these words in the past, there was a part of me that believed that serious ill health would happen to me in some distant future. Like many of us, I exercise, try to eat healthy foods, and take care of myself. So I was stunned to find myself with a severe case of shingles, lying in a dark room with shingles-induced migraine headaches that lasted over two weeks. I have never experienced headaches that powerful. There was nothing to distract me from the pounding pain and I had no idea how long it would go on. I was completely dependent on my husband, Woody, who was by my side day and night the entire time. I felt deeply frightened as I realized I had no escape from this pain, from this illness. I felt trapped.

In the midst of all of this, my practice was there for me, reminding me to be present with my in-breath and out-breath. I realized that two things were going on: the very real bodily pain, and my emotional reaction to it. I knew that the more I fought the pain, the worse I would feel. I also could see that fear, self-blame, and despair were overwhelming me and making things worse. I started playing Anh-Huong's tape "Opening the Heart of Compassion," listening to one gatha at a time since that is all the sound I could tolerate. Soon I was lying in bed repeating "Breathing in, I am still alive; Breathing out I smile to life." Breathing in, I was alive -- in pain, yes, but still alive. Breathing out, I smile to life. Pain is part of life; the only option was to smile and gently hold it. I still spent time crying in Woody's arms and at times felt deep despair, but I could return to that gatha and find a point of balance on which to rest.

As the months passed, I have slowly started to feel better and I have begun to understand more deeply another verse from the Five Remembrances

My actions are my only true belongings. There is no way to escape the consequences of my actions. They are the ground on which I stand.

Even though my practice is a modest one, the habit of attending Thursday night sittings, Days of Mindfulness, and retreats, along with practicing at home, sustained me at a time when it was extremely difficult to focus and stay positive. I could practice deep relaxation techniques, mindful walking, and meditation only because these habits had been built up over the years. The practice supported me so that I could be with my fears, my pain, and my frustration and not be paralyzed by them. At the same time, I discovered a growing compassion for myself, for others who are ill, for those who live with pain on a daily basis and for all living beings who only wish to live, be healthy, and thrive. The small snowdrops that I saw pushing their way up through the snow, the first of the male bluebirds I heard singing to mark their nesting territory, people the world over, we all just want to be healthy and happy. We all want to live. None of us want to die. I even found myself looking after the stink bugs that have invaded my home, turning them right side up when they got stuck, knowing that they would die in a few days.

Another thing that I have come to understand more deeply is the importance of our Sangha. Beautiful messages of lovingkindness arrived

throughout the months in the form of healing energy, phone messages, emails, food, medicine, and visits. It is no wonder that we call Sangha one of the Three Jewels. I could breathe in and feel my Sangha brothers and sisters, my husband, my family, and my teachers there for me during this difficult time. I was not alone. I did not have to go through this alone. During hugging meditation, with each mindful in-breath and out-breath, their deep practice helped lead me back to that place of peace within myself.

I still have a ways to go to heal and to understand more deeply the issues that this prolonged illness has made me aware of:

How quickly my life can change, how insubstantial are the things I identify as “me,” how precious the present moment is, how every single living being treasures life.

This moment truly is the only moment we have, each breath is the ground on which we stand.

I am very grateful for everyone’s love and support during this time. I am so lucky to have found a Sangha who practices with such sincerity and love.

SPRING POEM

by Bill Menza

Just Another Thought
Just another delusional thought
Taking me away
From direct awareness
Of the flow
Right here now

OLGA'S KITCHEN

by Annie Mahon

Last weekend, I had the pleasure of visiting my family in Michigan. While there, I always try to have a sandwich at *Olga's Kitchen* restaurant. I grew up eating Olga's delicious pita bread sandwiches when there was just one location in downtown Birmingham. I was even eating an Olga's when my water broke for my last child!

So last weekend my nephews and I decided to get Olga's for

lunch. I got my favorite -- the veggie Olga with cheese topped with a yummy yogurt sauce and wrapped in sweet Olga pita bread. We picked the food up from Olga's and carried it home. We were all very

happy.... for about 60 seconds. I literally ate my sandwich in five bites while talking to my sister. Then I sat there wondering where my Olga went, and where my happiness went. And I thought, "Why in the world did I eat my Olga so quickly? I won't get another one for at least a year!"

I have discovered that I carry around a lot of conditioning about food and eating. For one thing, I imagine that certain foods (e.g., Olga's) are so amazing that having them will make me happy and that happiness will last forever. I won't have any problems; I'll never have to suffer if I eat this Olga's, or this chocolate, or this bagel. I may not think this consciously, but

part of me believes it, and causes me to eat unmindfully.

But what I'm discovering is that I also carry around the flip side of this habitual thinking. I believe if I stop and taste and enjoy this food and give it my full attention, it would waste time better spent doing some "important" work. This habitual thought says that really "good" people don't need to enjoy food, and they certainly never waste time savoring food or indulging in fully experiencing a meal that might leave Olga

sauce dribbling down their chins! So when I am being fully mindful of my chewing and the texture and flavor of my meal, that can trigger discomfort in me. Eating delicious food can be very sensual, and to allow myself to really indulge in the pleasure of eating can feel somehow wrong. So I'm sending myself opposing



Olga's veggie sandwich

messages: delicious food is all-powerful and will save me -- *and* enjoying that delicious food is wrong. It's enough to make me feel a little crazy.

I don't think I'm alone in this struggle. In some ways, the Buddha struggled with the same thing. He grew up as a prince in a palace, surrounded by sensual pleasures, including delicious food, and he found that even with all of these sensual pleasures, he was still subject to old age, sickness and eventually death. So he gave up food, living on one grain of rice a day (something some of us may have aspired to at one time). Just before he almost died of starvation, he saw that preventing himself from

enjoying food wasn't helping him reach enlightenment. He realized that food and sensual pleasures were themselves not the problem; what creates our suffering is both our craving for the sensual pleasures

-- thinking that they will make us happy forever, and our self-denial -- thinking we shouldn't have them. In order to wake up, we need to find a middle way.

How do we follow a middle way with regard to food and eating? Eating disorders seem to be epidemic in our culture, especially for women. If we believe what society tells us, we will continue to get caught in the cycles of food as savior... food as enemy... over and over again. To break out of the cycle, mindfulness shows us how to be present for all of our conditioning, and not to get hooked by it. We can respect and pay attention to each bite the same way we pay attention to a beautiful sunset, or listen to a dear friend. We can fully enjoy the experience of this food without expecting it to end all future suffering, *and* without judging ourselves for enjoying it. This moment, this bite, this breath, is all we really have.

For those of us conditioned by families, society, and friends, it may require lots of diligent practice and joining with others who practice mindful eating in order to transform our habits and return to our natural ability to eat with ease and joy. This is the deepest purpose of our Sangha, or community of practice, to water each

other's seeds of mindfulness. We are re-learning *how* to eat, not *what* to eat.

Thich Nhat Hanh describes mindful eating as learning to eat with our bodies and not just our minds:

How do we follow a middle way with regard to food and eating? Eating disorders seem to be epidemic in our culture, especially for women. If we believe what society tells us, we will continue to get caught in the cycles of food as savior... food as enemy... over and over again.

“There is a way of eating an orange that will increase your happiness one thousand times... The way you hold the orange, the way you peel it, the way you smell it, the way you visualize the orange tree, the way you take each section of the orange and put it into your mouth, the way you feel it

with your mindfulness, the orange juice coming slowly onto your tongue--these things are to be learned, and that is learning how to be happy.”

I love to sit and eat quietly and enjoy each bite, aware of the presence of my community, aware of all the hard and loving work that has gone into my food. When I eat in this way, not only am I physically nourished, I am also spiritually nourished. The way I eat influences everything else that I do during the day. If I can look deeply into my food and take this time as a meditation — just as important as my sitting or walking meditation — I receive the many gifts of the cosmos that I would not otherwise profit from if my mind were elsewhere.

When we learn how to eat like this, we can truly enjoy an Olga's sandwich for what it is -- nothing more, nothing less.

SONG OF SANGHA

by Joyce Solomon

Throughout my adult life, I have searched for a community of practice which felt "right" -- comfortable, challenging, and able to help me move along on my spiritual path. I wasn't exactly sure what I was looking for, but was sure I'd know when I found it. First, I joined religious congregations in the tradition in which I was raised. There was a comfort level, but they did not meet my deeper needs. Although I had been meditating for several years on my own or with one friend, still I knew there was something missing in my life.

Just before Pat, my husband, and I moved to Vermont, we started attending retreats at Claymont Court, West Virginia with the MPCF. I really can't find the right words to express how I felt after that first (and subsequent) retreats: "Immense gratitude to our teachers and Sangha brothers and sisters" comes close. In Vermont we joined the Sangha in White River Junction, Vermont, and I found another community of practice -- yet another group of people who practice deeply and compassionately. It was clear why the Sangha is a jewel, a jewel of immeasurable value. Now, I also frequently attend Sunday sits with the Sangha of the residential community MorningSun in Alstead, NH, established by Michael Ciborski (formerly Br. Michael, who lived in Plum Village). My heart overflows with gratitude for all practitioners on the path, and for the opportunity to be part of three communities.

The song "Many Hands" by Jody Kessler (www.jodykessler.com), Interfaith Minister from Ithaca, NY, is a song of gratitude to be sung before meals, or possibly in lieu of the Five Contemplations. I learned this song from Michael at MorningSun. It's a wonderful song, and I'd like to share it with the MPCF community.

As I share this link, I feel the deep connection between us all, and all things, and I have deep gratitude.

<http://www.openway.org/music/many-hands>

“MANY HANDS:”
Song written by Jody Kessler,
with adapted lyrics

On this plate
There are many hands
The hands that sowed the seeds
And the hands that tilled the land,
The hands that worked the harvest,
and brought it to the stands.
Yes on this plate are many hands.

In this bowl
Are sun and rain and air,
The garden's soil and all the tiny creatures that
live there.
A delicate balance
Of beings great and small.
Yes in this bowl we have them all.

In this food
There are many souls.
Some may be our family
Who served it in our bowl.
Some may be migrant workers
Whom we will never know,
And can't afford to buy the food they grow.

In this room
there are many hands.
Let's join them all together
In a circle if we can.
And in this sacred silence
Let there be gratitude
For the many hearts and hands that made this
food.
For the many hearts and hands that made this
food.

HOME

by Jill McKay

The church where MPCF meets participates in a program to provide shelter to the homeless one week a year. During that week in February, our Sangha meets for the Thursday sitting in a small kindergarten classroom attached to the church. On that Thursday it had been a difficult day at my work, which is to help people find jobs. One client told me that she wanted to end a contract early (loss of two jobs) and another was uncertain about her contract (possible loss of two more jobs). These events watered seeds in me of loss, abandonment, unworthiness, and a deep fear of what the future holds.

I was happy to be spending the evening with my friends in our beautiful space where the healing energy and sense of safety would calm my fears and restore my spirit. When I walked into the lobby, I was greeted by five middle-aged men who smiled uncertainly and looked at me as if to say, “Why are you here? We don’t know you. Do you belong with us?”

I had the sense of being judged and felt very uncomfortable, so I quickly brushed past them and went to change out of my work clothes.

When I emerged, they studied me even more closely with very uncertain smiles on their faces. This time, I was able to say, “I am here for the Mindfulness group.” They expressed embarrassed relief, and I went on my way to the kindergarten room.

Why was this interaction so disturbing to me? These were good people who gave up a night in their comfortable homes to welcome those in

need. Why did such strong feelings of discomfort and even hostility arise in me? During our sharing that evening, I described these events and touched on the sense of being judged. I felt that they were looking at me to see whether I was one of them, whether I belonged, and if so, where I fitted.

Although they were there to greet people, I did not feel welcomed. I shared that it made me aware

of the judge in me and how much I am not free from “the superiority complex, the inferiority complex, and the equality complex” that are the antithesis of the deep truth of interbeing that Thay teaches.



The way home

Since then, thanks to the deep listening of my friends that night, I have been able to look more deeply at what happened. The events earlier in the day had awakened seeds of fear of the unknown, uncertainty in my own abilities, and of being vulnerable to events outside my control. There are stories of middle-aged women living in comfort who through widowhood, divorce, ill-health, loss of work or other circumstances find themselves homeless and alone. This specter haunts me. I believe that when I walked into the lobby those kind men also feared that I was one of those women, and their own seeds of uncertainty and fear of destitution were watered, too.

I know that if Thay had been the one walking into that lobby, he would have smiled his peaceful smile and assured them, “I am not homeless. I am home.” Although it was deeply uncomfortable at the time, I am so grateful to those men and to our Sangha because I was able to acknowledge my fear, and to pay attention to my reactions. The sense of safety that allowed me to share the experience with my friends in the Sangha let me move beyond hostility and rejection, and gave me the courage to continue to look deeply into the events of that evening.

Our teacher, Anh-Huong, encourages us to acknowledge and cradle our baby of pain, so that our suffering and our joy together enrich our lives and the lives of those we love. By sharing with my friends that Thursday, and through the compassion of their deep listening, I have been able to start on a journey of understanding a source of my own suffering that drives much of my behavior. Writing this story for the newsletter, I hope that all of us who are connected through this practice can benefit from our acts of open-hearted and deep looking, and that the safety and loving energy of our Sangha will guide the way for all of us to come back to our true home.

TAKING REFUGE IN THE SANGHA

by Elisabeth Dearborn



New Year's gift envelope

The ice is inches thick beneath my boots. I edge my way from the car to the steps going to the meditation hall. Other friends come bringing zabutons, benches, flowers, rugs, smiles, hugs on this wintry night. We are gathering to celebrate the lunar new year.

The circle is fifteen people. The candle is lit. The room quiets with sitting, then walking. New faces, familiar faces. Someone has brought a boyfriend we've been hearing about. Another makes special arrangements for a babysitter and arrives with her husband.

For a month we have been inviting each other in the Mountains and Rivers Mindfulness Community in southern Vermont to form a question about his/her life. This is the night we bring our questions to the Oracle Ceremony. The Oracle Ceremony is traditionally done in the monasteries of our tradition using a 13th century Chinese poem translated into English couplets by Thay. Each couplet is numbered and a set of numbers is put into red envelopes and placed in the meditation hall bell for the ceremony.

At our Oracle Ceremony in Putney, this night we sit and breathe with one another as each person steps onto the path and bows and is bowed to by the community, then walks mindfully to the cushion before the bell, prostrates before the bell, and then sits facing the community, left hand cupping the edge of the bell. We sit together as a body quietly breathing. Then the practitioner offers his/her question, quietly reaches into the bottom of the bell for a response from "the poet." Our poet is Thich Nhat Hanh. We have taken 30 or so excerpts from his poetry, recorded them in small scrolls tied with colored embroidery thread, and put them in the bell.

We follow the same form as the monasteries do, but with Thay's words. The bell master guides the Sangha to offer interpretation if it is needed. Sometimes this comes in a song or a few words. The miracle of interbeing is at work.

Sometimes the poetry speaks directly to the question. One practitioner asks, "Dear Oracle, can you help me work through the obstacles to making deeper connections?" The Oracle offers in response: "I vow to bring joy to one person in the morning and to relieve the suffering of one person in the afternoon." The practitioner bows and returns to her cushion. No interpretation. So clear. As question after question is brought before the Sangha, our concentration deepens. We descend together into a pool of mutual insight emerging as one heart through many voices.

The room is filled with smiles and tears. The answer is so clear. Sometimes, when it is not so clear to the questioner, we invite reflections that open up ways of hearing the poet. The Sangha's wisdom is strong this night, and the treasure of a Sangha body comes alive as we share our collective wisdom.

I ask for advice on the bodhisattva path. How does the poet respond? I discover two scrolls with entwined strings come out of the bell into my hand.

One reads:

"We come back to live in the wonderful present,
To Plant our heart's garden with good seeds,
And to make strong foundations of
understanding and love."

The other reads:

"Breathing in,
I have become space
Without boundaries.
I have no plans left.
I have no luggage."

I receive these responses with amazement, as if at this very moment I am at the foot of the Buddha, yet also in the here and now of 2011. I smile with joy at my Sangha brothers and sisters. We offer to one another a deep bow.

THE ORACLE **Celebration of Tet, 2004** **by Emily Whittle**

Stop.
Drop everything
except your breath
and walk toward the altar
like a bride
advancing toward her beloved.
Sit on your cushion
tall and serene,
concentrating
until your heart's desire
burns in your chest
like a glowing ember.
Then lay yourself
face down
on the earth,

letting the hard shell
of your mind
crack open,
spilling its arrogance
into the soil.

When you are empty,
Stand up.

Breathe three times.

In. Out.

In. Out.

In. Out.

Then leap

Into the wishing well.

From the other side
of time,

deep at the bottom
of the well,

a poet will raise his
arms,

catching your fall.

His love will lift you

back into time,
holding a ticket to

joy.

This ticket

bears a number

that corresponds to a door.

Find this door

and open it.

On the other side

is a path.

Do not hesitate.

There is no mistake.

This is the path.

Straight ahead,

the object of your desire

reaches out

to take your hand.

WHAT THE PRACTICE OFFERS

by Garrett Phelan



Door at Plum Village

A mat, a cushion,
a candle, incense,
a breath,
the sound of the bell,
and the present moment.

A cup of tea,
a biscuit,
a clementine,
a breath,
the sound of the bell
and the present moment.

A step,
another step,
a gentle movement,
another gentle movement,
a breath,
the sound of the bell
and the present moment.

A mat, a cushion,
a candle, incense,
a breath,
the sound of the bell
and a sangha.

COMMITTEE FOR THE RELIEF OF POOR CHILDREN IN VIETNAM

A non-profit organization (IRS section 501 c-3) – Federal ID No.: 54-1828964

E-mail: crpcv@crpcv.org

Web site: www.crpcv.org

Oakton, Virginia
January 1st, 2011

Dear Friends:

We are sending loving thoughts and warm wishes along with this letter. Throughout the years, your love and support have touched and transformed the lives of many poor children and their families in Vietnam. When the flower of compassion opens, its fragrance penetrates into the cosmos. Thank you for your presence in this world.

During 2010, the Committee for the Relief of Poor Children in Vietnam (CRPCV) provided food and schooling for more than 600 nursery school students and salaries for two teachers in Quang Tri Province. Unfortunately, during the year we had to end our program of giving scholarships to 200 elementary and middle school students in Hue due to a lack of fund and difficulties in getting letters from these students.

However, other projects have manifested. As I am writing this letter, with funds from CRPCV, construction is occurring (adding a dining room, a kitchen and a toilet) at the nursery school in Vinh Lai village, Trieu Phong district, Quang Tri province. Parents and teachers are all very happy that their dream is becoming a reality.



Recently CRPCV received a letter from our social work friends in Quang Tri asking for assistance for 80 children between the ages of 2 and 6, so that they can attend Hai Chanh nursery school, where they learn, play, eat lunch, nap and are cared for. These children are from the Cau Nhi quarter of Hai Chanh town, Hai Lang district. Their parents earn a living mainly through farming and selling firewood. Only 40 of the 120 children in Cau Nhi are currently able to go to school. The other 80 children stay home because their parents cannot afford to pay the required school fees.

In 2011, CRPCV would like to assist these 80 children. We hope to provide \$5 per month for each child, and also \$35 per month each for eight additional teachers. We ask for your help so that our little friends can go to school and their teachers can receive a modest salary.

CRPCV is a federally recognized charitable organization and all donations are tax deductible. One hundred percent of each donation supports poor children and their families in Vietnam. All of our administrative time and costs are borne by our volunteer staff. Donations can be sent to CRPCV, 10413 Adel Road, Oakton, VA 22124.

The teachers in the schools we assist help us understand the children and their world. Below are two excerpts from their letters. We are also including drawings from the nursery school children.

On behalf of the poor children, their parents and teachers in Vietnam, we wish you many peaceful steps and joyful breaths in each day of the New Year 2011.

With gratitude,
Anh-Huong Nguyen

Letter from Ngo Thi Ngoc Anh, a nursery school teacher in Hai Thanh village:

It is hard to earn a living in a poor land like this. The majority of the children are not in school because their parents can't afford to pay their school fees. Salaries for the teachers come from the school fees, so when there are not enough students, the teachers do not receive their full salaries.

In the past, many parents took their small children with them to work all day in the fields. They were concerned an accident would happen if the children were left home alone by themselves. Now, with your love and support, more children are able to join the nursery school. Their parents are now better able to focus on their work. Also, my life as a teacher has become more settled financially. Thank you.

Recently, a big typhoon submerged all the rice plants. The farmers' small capital, time and hard labor of the past months were gone with the big flood. People were panicked. After the water receded, they went into the rice fields hoping to harvest what was left, but all the rice plants had rotted. The harvest was completely lost. Nevertheless, they told me that they were so thankful that their children were in school. They asked me to convey to you their immense gratitude for all your help from thousands of miles away.

UPCOMING EVENTS

(Please visit the MPCF website for updates, suggested donations, and directions.)

Ongoing Activities in the UUCF Chapel (Program Building)

Morning Guided Sitting Meditation:

Opportunity to relax, sit quietly and comfortably. Practice enjoying each moment of sitting and mindful walking.

Monday to Friday 8:15-9:15 am (except Thursday)
Thursday 8:00-9:00 am

Morning Mindful Movement:

Learn to be mindful with movements. Improve one's health and vitality with soft physical exercises, Tai-Chi and Qigong.

Thursday 9:15-10:00 am

Noon Guided Sitting Meditation:

Thursday 12:00-12:45 pm

Thursday Evenings Meditation with Anh- Huong:

A peaceful evening of meditation, mindful movements, walking meditation and dharma sharing. Every Thursday from 7:30-9:00 pm

First Thursday of month: Recitation of the Five Mindfulness Trainings and Dharma talk by Anh-Huong.

Tea and cookies 6:45-7:25pm. Sitting begins at 7:30pm

Before meditation you are invited to join us for tea and cookies any time between 6:30 and 7:20 pm.

Workshops & Classes

Summer Weekend Retreat in West Virginia led by Anh-Huong and Thu Nguyen

June 10-12, 2011 From 6:00 pm Friday to 2:00 pm Sunday Practicing mindfulness in a rural setting for the whole weekend, together with a loving and supportive community.

Days of Mindfulness

led by Anh-Huong and Thu Nguyen
Saturdays at the MPCF in Oakton, Virginia (in the Chapel) April 9, 2011 and May 28, 2011
from 8:45 am -4:00 pm.

Half Days of Mindfulness

led by Anh-Huong and Thu Nguyen
Saturdays at the MPCF in Oakton, Virginia (in the Chapel) April 30 2011 and May 14, 2011
8:45am -1:00 pm

Fall Weekend Retreat in West Virginia

led by Anh-Huong and Thu Nguyen -
September 23-25, 2011 From 6:00 pm Friday to 2:00 pm Sunday Practicing mindfulness in a rural setting for the whole weekend, together with a loving and supportive community.

Submission Guidelines

Along The Path is a newsletter of the art of mindful living. Practicing mindfulness cultivates understanding, love, compassion, and joy. This practice helps us to take care of and transform suffering in our lives and in our society.

Along The Path is intended as an inspiration and teaching resource for those practicing mindfulness in daily life.

Writers please submit stories, poems, photos, art and teachings on mindfulness, based on your direct experience of transformation through the practice of mindfulness. Instead of giving academic or intellectual views, the teachings emphasize simple and successful ways to transform the difficulties and limitations in our lives so that each day becomes an experience of peace, happiness, and freedom.

Along the Path

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