

# along the Path

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The Newsletter of the Mindfulness Practice Center of Fairfax

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## THE MIND OF LOVE AND SECOND BODY PRACTICE

by Anh-Huong Nguyen

Sangha is a practicing community where there is brotherhood and sisterhood. The atmosphere of peace, warmth and safety found within the MPCF sangha is the fruit of our turning to Buddha, Dharma and Sangha for refuge over the years.

*Buddha* here means Buddha nature – capacity to be awake to the joy of being alive and the suffering in our heart. *Dharma* is the practice of mindfulness, concentration and insight leading to healing, happiness and growth of bodhicitta.

*Bodhicitta* is the mind of love, a spark of fire awaiting to manifest from the depth of one's heart. It helps us to build brotherhood and sisterhood, mending the fabric of humanity which has been torn in our world. Awareness of suffering and desire to transform suffering in oneself and in others are needed for this fire to manifest – for it to bring light and warmth to places of darkness.

Many young people resort to drugs, sex and alcohol because of loneliness and pain. Much of their time is spent texting and chatting on the Internet in an effort to stay connected with peers.

Living with loneliness and depression is like living in an unheated house in winter. Pain of loneliness frequently leads to addiction. These young people need help. Blaming, judgment and punishment only make them suffer more.

Sisterhood and brotherhood are the essence of a true sangha. Here, mindfulness is the foundation

for loving speech and compassionate listening. Living in a sangha can awaken a person's bodhicitta and heal them from addiction. Wherever there is brotherhood and sisterhood, there is happiness and healing.



In mid February, one of the MPCF's Thursday evening meditations was moved to the Montessori school because its regular space was used to host the homeless. Having the sangha sit so close together in a small kindergarten classroom, I became aware of newcomers' unease. But my heart knew it was fine. Almost everyone shared during our circle that evening. The sharings were profound. A friend said that because we were sitting in a small kindergarten classroom, she was able to share her story for the first time after several months of coming to our sangha.

At MPCF sangha, we are encouraged to sit close to each other and not leave a big space between

us. As much as we would like to connect with each other, old fears can prevent us from doing so. As the mats, cushions and chairs are brought closer together, our doubts and fears are embraced by the sangha energy of mindfulness. Doubts and fears begin to melt within the sangha's warm loving light. Our heart can close no more.

Coming to sangha brings us peace, joy and healing. Guided meditation, total body relaxation, mindful movement, walking meditation, mindful meal, dharma talk, sharing circle, singing, hugs and smiles are wonderful practices that nourish us all. In the spirit of continuing to strengthen mindfulness and build brotherhood and sisterhood within MPCF sangha, a group of friends came together recently to explore a practice called *Second Body*.

Those who have been coming regularly to MPCF sangha are invited to participate in this practice of second body. First, we sit and enjoy breathing quietly together as a "sangha body". Then each person who participates is paired with another person of same gender through a random process. The two partners will take time listening to and supporting each other in their mindfulness practice as second bodies. They designate a time each week in which they make contact with each other to practice deep listening together. They share with each other about their practice during the week. They may choose to sit quietly together, drink tea, share a meal, take walks in nature, or do anything in a mindful spirit that waters seeds of joy and healing.

It is helpful to begin each meeting with a few minutes of quiet breathing and relaxation. Short written guidelines may be read to reinforce the intention to be together as second bodies. This is followed by a few minutes of "selective touching" practice - which is talking about positive things. Words of gratitude can come at the end.

The two partners decide on how much time to spend for each meeting. A round of Second Body Practice lasts for eight weeks. After that, our sangha meets and listens to everyone's experiences and sets the date for the next period of Second Body Practice.

Second Body Practice can bring up fear of intimacy. We are uncertain about making commitment to spend time with a sangha friend every week. Old mental formations and stories may arise in us. With sangha's support, one can look deeply into these mental formations in order to heal them.

By breathing and walking with the sangha, we learn how to relax our body, calm our mind and open our heart to speaking and listening deeply. As we learn to listen to a sangha sister's sharing with calm mind and open heart, we see ourselves in her and she in us. Practicing with our second body is practicing with the sangha because both partners are part of the sangha. The time spent in Second Body Practice is for building brotherhood and sisterhood, and cultivating bodhicitta. It brings nourishment and healing to both partners, their families and our sangha.

Both partners need to keep in mind that the sangha is always "present" at second body weekly meetings, because each is also a second body of the sangha. This allows for deep sharing and true protection for both partners and the sangha. During sharing circle on Thursday night sangha, when one person joins palms and starts speaking from the heart, we all listen deeply. Looking from the outside, one person seems to be speaking and others are merely listening. But, because the atmosphere is one of peace and safety, everyone's heart is open to hold what is being said including the one who is speaking.

We are cells within the sangha body. When mindfulness and concentration are strong, there is no separation between the one who speaks and

those who listen. So the sangha is speaking and listening at the same time. This is called the “emptiness nature” of speaker and listener, which means both speaker and listener are empty of a separate self. Our aspiration is to listen to our second body until we see ourselves in her. This is the true meaning of second body.

The sangha’s Second Body Practice helps us strengthen our bodhicitta and walk the bodhisattvas’ path. We humbly ask our land, blood and spiritual ancestors to guide and support us in this practice.



Downy Woodpecker

## **WE ARE ALL OF THE NATURE**

by Diane Strausser

It has been almost two years since that day in late April. My mind drifts back again and again. The daffodils were happy and yellow but bent over with the weight of the full, grey sky. People arrived, coming in quietly; nobody left. We paced the house. We made coffee. There were hushed telephone conversations.

Mostly, we sat at his bed. Early that morning, I knew he was dying. I checked on him at 5:30a.m. He looked at me and said, “I love you,” the only words he had spoken in more than twenty-four hours. His eyes closed and he never spoke again. He let go at that moment and surrendered to the deep sleep that precedes death.

Six weeks before, he had been diagnosed with terminal cancer. Pain medications made it possible for him to live to the fullest while actively dying. He called everybody and told them he loved them. He told silly “dying” jokes. He cried sometimes and we cried with him. We planned his funeral service with him. He chose the poetry of Mary Oliver because her words had been so moving to both of us through the years. Typical of him, he did not want any fanfare. He had spent twenty-eight years in the submarine service. Staying quiet and unnoticed fit him.

His mother visited and said good-bye. His son came and cried with his father. Friends came. Stories were told. Silence was shared. He called in religious leaders and coaxed them to tell him “how to die.” People prayed with him and meditated with him. His Catholic community held him up in prayer. My Buddhist community chanted for him, for us. We were never alone.

Richard was a devout Catholic. I found Rosaries and tiny prayer books tucked into his bathroom drawers, his car console, and his workshop.

These things I never knew about him. I smiled when I found a brown silk mandala keychain that I gave him when I came back from Plum Village. He had attached his Catholic medals to it and used them as prayer beads. Those surprises still please me. He was truly a man of God.

His Catholic self accompanied me to many retreats. We visited Blue Cliff to be with Thay and the community. We drove hundreds of miles to be with our MPCF friends. He loved Thu and Anh-Huong. He loved our playfulness and the depth of our practice.

He attended Sangha and helped establish our Bliss Run Mindfulness Community. Richard was our sherpa. He carried and lugged and set up and broke down, but he would never lead. He poked me during quiet times and made faces when I led. When we talked about wearing a half smile, he smiled with just half of his face. Just conjure up that image. Because of his unassuming presence, few people knew how funny he could be.

The year before his death, Bliss Run Mindfulness Community studied The Five Remembrances. *"We are all of the nature to grow ill. We are all of the nature to die."* We had many discussions about them, he and I. Thankfully, when the time came, we were prepared.

The hospice nurses told us ours was the most peaceful home they ever visited. There were no high emotions, no wailing or gnashing of teeth. He and I were able to set the tone for others who came. His process of leaving this world was calm and mindful, even sweet. Chanting by the monastics and quiet hymns played, but mostly, there was the music of silence, his and mine. In time, he spent most of his day sleeping. I sat by his bed gazing out the window watching the birds he and I loved so much. I asked him what he thought he would come back as. "Let me think about that." Days later he

announced that he was ready with the answer. "Whenever you see a Downy Woodpecker, it will be me." But, of course -- Downy Woodpeckers are small; they are typically loners, and they don't make a big show.

On that Spring day, almost two years ago, morning turned to evening. The whole family was present. Our daughters and I were in his room when the gray sky parted and a splash of sunbeams met the earth. His breathing was labored and we all knew there would only be a few more breaths. I was holding his left hand. One daughter held his right hand. One daughter held both of his feet. In my quietest voice, I told him about the sky opening up. I told him God had sent the angels for him. There was a long space between breaths and then the final one. It was 7:15 p.m., April 26, 2010.

For months, I sat in a rocking chair gazing out the window. I rarely cried. Suspended animation gripped me and a profound silence was all I felt in my body and in my mind. Nothingness. Just sitting in my quiet bubble. Sitting in my dazed grief.

Our practice gave Richard the most beautiful death. It was profound in its peace. Our practice gave me the ability to live. And, I am peaceful and oh, so grateful for the Three Jewels.

I was ordained at Blue Cliff last Fall. Anh-Huong put her hands on my shoulders and told me, "Diane, Richard will ordain with you." Little did I know. While practicing walking meditation on the left path leading to the meditation hall, I admired the new trees that had been planted since my last visit to the monastery. Glancing down, I noticed the plaque that said, "In loving memory of Richard Scanlin." The tears flowed and I dropped to my knees. My Catholic husband was there standing at the entrance to the meditation hall in a direct line with Thay's cabin. There are still no words to describe his presence with me that day and forever.



## THE CLOUD IN YOUR TEA

by **Thay Thich Nhat Hanh**

*(Transcribed and edited by Garrett and Jane Phelan from a Question and Answer session at Blue Cliff Monastery October 2011)*

**Question:** I'm suffering with not knowing that my communication with my late wife is not just in my imagination. I know that after we continue, we're conscious..... but I wonder if we can know that we can still have the consciousness of our loved ones with us after their continuation?

**Thay:**

Suppose you look into the family album and you see yourself as a 5-year old boy. And you ask, "Where is the boy now? Has he died or not?" And that is meditation. You know that five-year old boy has not died. He has transformed so much and now you are the continuation of him, of that five-year old boy. Can you talk to the five-year old boy in you, or is the little boy just an invention of your mind? In reality, if you can talk to the five-year old boy in you, who was you, then you can talk to your wife also. Provided you are not caught by the sign, by the form you used to see him or her.

It's as if you are caught in the sight of the cloud. And then you look in the tea, and you don't see the cloud any more.

Being free from signs, then you can still see the cloud in the tea. The cloud is in a different form in the tea. The cloud is not an invention of my mind. It is a reality itself. Your wife is in a new manifestation now. Don't think that she is only outside of you; she may be in you. You can talk to her deeply and very well.

I can talk to my mom. I can talk to my dad. I can talk to my teacher. And I feel them very well, very real. I know that my hand has the hand of my mom in it. So when I touch my right hand with my left hand, not only do I touch my hand but I touch her hand. When I touch my forehead

with my hand, the hand of my mother is touching my forehead. This is very real; this is not imagination. It's not a product of the mind.

So nothing is lost. The cloud cannot die. Your late wife is still there with you, in her new form, maybe more beautiful, younger. And you should be free of prejudices in order to be able to be in contact.

You *are* in touch with her, and you *are* her to some extent. The question is, whether you are able to be in touch with yourself? Can you be in touch with yourself and with the five-year-old that was you? If you cannot be in touch with yourself and the five-year old that was you, you cannot be in touch with her. So be in touch with yourself, and if you succeed, being in touch with her becomes very easy.



jsp, *Teacup.*  
Ink and wash on paper

## STEPPING OUT OF A LOOP

by Denys Candy

*(This article will also be in the March issue of "Breathe, You Are Online," published by Mindfulness Ireland.)*

Recently, after a weekend in the grip of sub-zero winter temperatures, Monday morning brought out the sun, blazing through the Pennsylvania woodlands near our home. My wife and I set off for an early walk, but my head was like a pressure cooker, hot with thinking about all the stuff I had to put aside just to get a little exercise. In order not to "waste" any time, I tried to begin a conversation about an upcoming overseas trip – there were tickets to book, schedules to coordinate, etc. But the urgency of my need to talk was matched by my wife's need for quiet. She usually doesn't like making plans while walking in the woods. I knew this, and yet, feeling thwarted, my heart hardened a bit and I fell into a huff. We marched along for a time, both of us annoyed, snow crunching beneath our boots.

Having encountered Thich Nhat Hanh more than twenty years ago on a Day of Mindfulness in Boston, I have a fair bit of practice under my belt – almost two decades permeated by retreats, regular sitting with a Sangha, ordination into the Order of Interbeing – yet, here I was, still acting the "eejit." Like a lobster in a pot, I was trapped, aggression and frustration churning in an old cycle. Somewhere in childhood, in adolescence, or perhaps early adulthood, I must have learned to resent the world when it doesn't bend to my will. It is easy for me to hold on to being mad, sometimes indiscriminately. That morning in the woods, I was mad at all before me – my beloved wife, a passer-by, even a stray dog. But a deeper part of me was also aware that it was better to short-circuit that loop, to find a way back to neutral ground, and the sooner, the better. This is how a daily drip-feed of on-again, off-again mindfulness practice builds up over time to offer one tangible benefits. Somehow, I was able to

notice myself feeling lousy and as I was striding faster and faster up a steep hillside, I remembered that counting breaths could help me.

That is Step One on my mental tip sheet: *Remember to focus attention on breathing in and out three or four times; recite the gatha, "Breathing in, I know that I am breathing in; Breathing out, I know that I am breathing out."*

As we ascended through the trees, snow glistening everywhere, I counted eight steps to two breaths and felt calmer, but not calm enough. When my wife batted my arm, smiled and grabbed my hand as if to say, "Let's be happy!" I found myself shrugging her off and walking on. Here was a familiar choice point, a fork on the path of daily life. Ingrained in me was the habit of rejecting a truce, of continuing to feed my resentment, impulsively asserting my right to be angry, an aggrieved party. Luckily, there is a Step Two on my tip sheet: *Stop; hit the pause button; breathe and notice sights and sounds all around in addition to the strong emotions in me.* I took in the sunlight in the trees and let my wife catch up with me. Quietly, we watched as a woodpecker and two nuthatches revealed themselves right in front of us, chirping away, foraging in the bare branches. To me, pausing is a bit like putting lotion on a burn – immediate relief for a sore spot. Like potter's clay under a drop of water, my heart softened slowly.

My tip sheet (the short version) concludes with Step Three: *Prolong the pause; do one's best not to act on the impulse to grab at a quick fix; let the lotion sink in.* In my case, this meant resisting the urge to initiate talking and planning right away, the moment I felt a hint of relief from anger and frustration. It also meant leaning into the opportunity to refrain from berating myself for getting hot under the collar in the first place.

Walking on, not yet talking, I was aware of holding my wife's hand. I still carried many thoughts, a few anxieties, but also more awareness of high bare oaks, crisp air on my face and the layer of ice in a tiny stream under which water freely moved. In time, I was relaxing into the day. Later, with a clearer mind, I would get a better start on those urgent tasks.

In my view, for mindfulness to be useful, the mundane encounters of daily life must constitute our practice ground. They are where "the long road turns to joy."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Nhat Hanh, Thich (2012) *The Long Road Turns to Joy*, Rev. Ed. Berkeley, CA, Parallax Press



The high bare oaks

## **SWEET SYMPATHY OF SANGHA**

**by Ushi Nottnagel**

In 2010, after my husband, Ethan, had been treated for Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma, we decided to add more meditation to our lives. He wanted to register for the next Mindfulness Retreat at Claymont Court. After he had signed up, between the sign-up and the retreat, he developed a physical handicap. We were totally overwhelmed by these changes, and his condition got worse every day. I brought him to Claymont Court anyway. Once there, everybody assured me that he would be fine.

On Saturday morning, Ethan called me and asked to be picked up. Since I needed to work, we agreed that I would pick him up in the evening. He would call and tell me when. The phone call came very late. He said: "Anh-Huong is inviting you to come for lunch on Sunday and I would love for you to meet these people here. They are all heart." No mention of wanting to be picked up early.

I came on Sunday for the dharma talk and lunch. Anh-Huong gave me the warmest hug—ever—she was there for me. She held me and I cried. The challenges, the helplessness, and my fears came up. And the group was equally welcoming.

We both attended the retreats the following December and March. At this point, Ethan was walking with a walker. The Sangha members were very attentive. We were always in the front. I helped him with meals and to get ready for the meditations. Sangha members jumped in whenever we were in need of an extra hand, and we felt nurtured in many ways. This environment was most comfortable for me -- more than anywhere else.

In March, I felt I had figured out how much help was needed to support Ethan's own initiative. Even care-taking has to be learned.



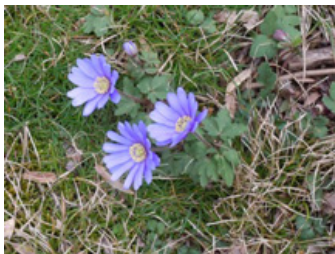
*Sweet Symphony of Sangha*  
By Ethan Fischer

*Sweet Symphony of Sangha  
lifts the spirit with courage  
just to breathe  
in and out each  
day and night as change  
arrives for me.*

Unfortunately in May, Ethan got weaker – fast. He had a recurrence of the cancer. By then we had formed a six-person strong meditation group of friends who had attended the Claymont Court retreats. After the diagnosis, we six met every Sunday at our house to meditate and sing. The hours of togetherness were our biggest support. No matter how weak Ethan was, he participated in some way. He was always happier afterwards, more peaceful, and each week, he contributed some wisdom.

On June 17, 2011, Ethan died peacefully at home with me by his side. The next day Anh-Huong and Thu came to our house to be with my family and friends and say good-bye to Ethan. What a gift!

In December I attended the retreat for the first time by myself. I treasured the empathy and many hugs. As hard as it was, I feel I belong to the Sangha with Ethan as well as without him.



## LAST POEMS OF ETHAN FISCHER

Ethan Fischer, a poet and teacher, practiced with the MPCF community at Claymont Court during his illness. He passed away June 17, 2011. Ushi Nottmangel, Ethan's wife, shared the story of his last poem, *New Choir Choice*.

Only a few days before he passed, Ethan told Ushi he had a poem. He couldn't write by that time, so Ushi wrote out his last poem as he spoke it to her.

### NEW CHOIR CHOICE

Soon perhaps  
I shall join my voice  
to the deep choir  
thrilling underneath ground.

Our director knows  
the soil shifts of music  
and directs us down and up.

The audience has grown hungry,  
but they stay for a while,  
sensing legend here  
dying or being born.

### SUNG DYNASTY SONG

*for Ushi*

Old in this year's greenest time,  
I fall ill, grown weak and thin.

My wife whistles, works to open and close  
each day with nourishment.

She dusts until the Sun is sharp again.  
She gathers herbs from our gardens.  
Fish swim to her...

I am lucky to live in these  
spring and summer shadows...  
Everything she knows.



## PROGNOSIS

Here secures noon  
between spring & summer.  
My cure proceeds  
with moving chemistry  
of each day through...

Kids know our playground  
means to breathe fun.  
A small oak teaches me  
to stand still in my roots,  
to lift limbs to sip sky.

Surely goodness & mercy  
shall follow us home  
from the swings  
and pavilion  
where spirit plays

with each moment  
being kind of always  
meant for the cardinal  
whose song stops here  
for a squirming meal.  
Surely sleep helps  
& wife whose hands  
learn to preserve time  
together in our old age  
breathing today's gleam.



## SISTER MOON, BROTHER SUN

by Jim Ebaugh

4:45 a.m.

So very curious: Here, I rise without alarm,  
every time -- no three hits on the snooze, no  
faithful dog licking my ears telling me in her  
loving way, "JIM! GET UP, YOU'LL BE LATE  
TO WORK AND I NEED MY KIBBLES AND  
BITS." Gone is the morning buck-naked stagger  
to the shower and the coffee pot, my usual  
morning monosyllabic caveman routine cannot  
be found. Here, my sleep is deep and I shoot  
awake.

5:15 a.m.

Shower fresh -- crisp here in the pre-dawn hills,  
the retreat sleeps. I am not alone.  
Sister Moon lights the cloud at my feet, resting  
in crystalline transformation, a shimmering frost  
of countless jewels held gently by living grass. I  
take a step. It is captured so much like  
Armstrong's on *Tranquility*, the frost holds the  
kiss of my foot on the earth.

5:30 a.m.

Sister Moon is slipping west very fast now; she  
calls my eyes. I see her, really see her. I see her  
birth of the earth, a cataclysm of violence, of  
cosmic collisions; the scars, and mostly the time  
-- the countless billions of years. In the midst of  
her ancient past suffering, I touch her, I touch  
awe at her beauty in the here and now. She  
brings past to present; she brings a future so  
connected to this precious blue planet we ride  
together in this wonderful moment. Sister Moon,  
Mother Earth, and Jim Ebaugh: we inter-are in  
the here and now, present moment, precious  
moment.

7:00 a.m.

Now, I am sitting, mind again restless,  
wondering which meditation I should choose  
from *Blooming of the Lotus* for my own Sangha

meeting tonight. Where did that presence in the present moment go? I sense a longing for that meditation of just a few moments ago, communion with Sister Moon, Brother Sun arisen; Brother Sun, Sister Moon. A breath arises, a breath falls away. A bright veil of frost drips on the meditation hall window. The cloud in the frost, the cloud is the water of my life, the cloud in me. No birth, no death for one precious moment in the life of this very simple country teacher.



jsp, *Sun and Moon*.  
Mixed media on paper

## **THERE ARE TIMES DURING THE DAY**

**by Sara Becker**

There are times during the day when everything seems to be missing, when the wanting feels

totally unfilled and unfillable, and a terrific, silent crying comes. At the same time, i feel as if everything is whited out or muted, as if what's alive in me is hidden in thick fog.

Other times, the volume comes back up; the fog clears. Easily, i see my sadness and confusion—or, suddenly i glimpse that everything is present, and always has been.

One afternoon, i wake up from a nap. An ocean of sunlight glints off the glass candleholder on my windowsill. In one tiny spot, a full rainbow of colors, glimpsed simultaneously, no moment of thought separating them. Just: *ah!* -- colors, glint, light-ocean, clear glass shining. The partly burned beeswax candle, rich creamy golden color. Just that.

Coming downstairs to make lunch, i think that there isn't enough food in the refrigerator. All week, i've been feeling there's not enough to satisfy me, rifling through my stores, eating until my belly's stretched and still feeling a near-miss, a residual hunger. But now i find there's plenty for two meals. As i'm cooking, i stop to look at the ingredients: in the pot, chopped onion, turmeric and paprika boiling, sending up a rich savor; on the chopping block, bright orange carrots looking crisp and sweet, crescents of juicy lemon; beside them, in a stainless steel bowl, halved tender small white turnips and coarsely chopped dark collard greens. Steam rises off boiling water that i'll use for rosehip tea. What more could i want or need?

It arrives just like that—like contact between match and lighter strip, and the flame, always there, flies up and manifests. Happiness.

Yesterday, as i was stirring my soup, i thought, what if i were to practice just really being here, the way i intend and want to be? What if i just showed up wholly for soup-stirring? I felt in my heart and flesh the potential for practicing *uninhibited*. A moment of no constrictions to define me. Then, as if without a moment's space, fear came: *I would be faking. That's not me. That never will be me. Why try?*

When i was little, i loved my parents so much. And we lived in a sad house. We were sad people. Sadness was a quality of home, just as my physical world was covered by red brick, cobblestones and asphalt, and its air carried the smell of car exhaust and cloud, ivory laundry detergent and maple leaves. My parents were sad. And i was sad, so i knew i was a part of our family.

I remember one time when i was ten or eleven i heard about some children my age on a camping trip. They sat around a bonfire in the evening, warmed and lit by the rising flames. Smiling, swaying, some held hands, some played the guitar, some sang. The song they sang was "Kumbaya." That, i'd heard, was a song of fake happiness. These people lived in a different world, where comfort like that seemed possible. They were in denial, or not as smart as we were. They didn't recognize the terrible dull sadness that always drifted in them, or the way their flesh hurt with the fullness of unknown energies. Sadness was real. Sadness was the closest thing to me. In my mind, the campfire glowed so invitingly. I wanted to be happy, accepted, one of them. But i wouldn't let that faerie image spirit me away.

Now, some thirty-five years later, i wonder, What is that song? I look it up and find that it's a

Creole spiritual: *Come by here, Lord. Come by here. Somebody is crying. Somebody is singing. Come by here. Come by here.*

So many years, my heart has been crying. But it has also been singing. I just never learned how to hear my own song. Sadness is always mixed with happiness. When i split them in two, i think that i only can inhabit one: i'm at home, or i'm away from home. I'm with myself or i'm with you. But the longing and the satisfaction of the longing are one. It's love that longs for love. The difference between me and those happy people is none.

When i break off parts of myself as not good enough and hide them, that's when my song gets lost, muffled, broken. That's when the same happens to my mind and heart. But love is always whole. I just may not feel whole enough right now to glimpse it. I may believe i can only tolerate some parts, not other parts.

Dear mother, dear father, when i step into happiness, i'm not abandoning you. We have always been there, all this time, together. I'm not stepping from one place into another. I'm letting go a part and stepping into the whole. I'm letting go the longing to feel the embrace that's always going on.

Dear Mommy, dear Daddy, now i see that the Sangha has always been here: Thu and Anh-Huong and Thay; Joanne and Pat; Vinh, Jill, and Jamie; Ushi and Ethan... Steve is here, sitting right here next to me, and Terry -- and Harold and Jeff and Maria -- Grandmom and Grandpa; Nadean, Robert, and Jay... We all sit in a circle. We hold hands, and sway a little bit and sing. This love has always been here. It has never been apart from us. I just didn't know how to see it. Now, my heart opening, it manifests like a bonfire, warming me, lighting my way.

## IN THE DEEP HEART'S CORE

by Garrett Phelan

To have inner peace even in our deepest suffering or most difficult situation is an important aspect of our mindfulness practice. In *Making Space: Creating a Home Meditation Practice*, Thich Nhat Hanh guides us towards how to create a peaceful outer space, especially in our home practice, in order to find inner peace.

In the introduction, Brother Phap Dung says, "When we have a peaceful space then we can come back to ourselves. That is the intention of sacred space... to make room so we can return to ourselves and touch something deep within ourselves."

In a recent workshop Jane and I offered on meditation, yoga and poetry, we chose to focus on a poem by William Butler Yeats:

### *The Lake Isle of Innisfree*

*I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,  
And a small cabin build there, of clay and  
wattles made;  
Nine bean rows will I have there, a hive for the  
honeybee,  
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.*

*And I shall have some peace there, for peace  
comes dropping slow,  
Dropping from the veils of the morning to where  
the cricket sings;  
There midnight's all a-glimmer, and noon a  
purple glow,  
And evening full of the linnet's wings.*

*I will arise and go now, for always night and day  
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the  
shore;  
While I stand on the roadway, or on the  
pavements gray,  
I hear it in the deep heart's core.*

The poet goes to his modest cabin by the lake to find the quiet and peace he desires. He knows "peace comes dropping slow." In the rhythmic last stanza, however, he returns, where he must, to the city: "While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements gray." But now, in his "deep heart's core" he carries the peaceful sound of "lake water lapping by the shore." He has taken the peace and quiet of that special space and held it in his deep heart's core so that he is able to touch that quiet peacefulness even in the hubbub and grayness of the city.

I began to think about the spaces where I find peace and quiet deep within myself. Since coming to the practice, Jane and I have worked hard to find and support those special, sacred places. Peace comes dropping slow at the Thursday night meditation, and Half Days and Full Days of Mindfulness at MPCF; weekend retreats at Claymont Court, and our Sunday night Sun and Moon sangha in Arlington. We have a peaceful little meditation corner in our house where we sit each morning. Our holidays are different now: we seek a quiet island, both literally and spiritually, for a week in the spring and in mid-fall.

And yet, reading Thay's book and remembering Yeats's poem, I am reminded that I must arise and go now, live my daily life in the real world with all stresses, anxieties, fears, and noise that might be there. I cannot hide in the meditation hall or on some quiet island. My practice is not a practice of running away from daily life or denying my suffering but of being wherever I am with the suffering and chaos I encounter. The question is whether the peace, quietness, and compassion I have found in those sacred places remain there -- or do I carry them in my deep heart's core?



# POETRY AND SHORT WRITINGS

Huntingdon State Correctional Institution was built in 1893 and is reminiscent of images of Alcatraz. Small cells with bars as one wall. The three-story cell block runs down the center of the cavernous, brick building, cast iron grates and stairs to walk on--very noisy, cold in winter, sweltering in summer.

## HAIKU

by **Louis J. Rocco**

A warm golden light  
Brightening this Buddha realm  
Sunshine on the wall

Louis J. Rocco is a long-time mindfulness practitioner and a prisoner at Huntingdon State Correctional Institution in Pennsylvania. He is a member of Spirit Sangha, a paper sangha cofounded by Wakeel Sabur and Carole Baker in 2002.

## THE WORLD OF "ME'S"

by **Bill Menza**

All suffering comes from "me" thinking,  
speaking and acting.  
We live in a world of "me's" because of social  
conditioning.  
We are drowning in this world of me's; suffering  
immensely.  
To be happy we have to leave the world of me's  
and live in the world of "us."  
One way to do this, is to turn all me's into you's  
and all you's into me's.  
When you see someone, say "that's me," and act  
accordingly.  
When you see yourself say "this is them," and  
act accordingly.

## SMILING TO MY SADNESS

by **Rosa Briceno**

Breathing in,  
Breathing out  
Stepping with the Sangha  
I smile to my sadness.

Breathing in,  
Breathing out  
Walking in the present moment  
I feel happy.

## ONE WORD PRACTICE

by **David Percival**

Just one word is all you need  
When you reach that place of fear, anger, despair

*Breathe*

follow your breath

*Stop*

your running, your mind, your projects

*Smile*

at your anger or despair

*Embrace*

with awareness what is happening

*Dwell*

mindfully in the present moment

*Walk*

peacefully with the steps of the Buddha

*Sit*

with solidity and freedom

The deep, simple, profound wisdom of our  
practice

Just one word

*Now*

## 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, Taiji 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*

#### **Weekend Retreats in West Virginia in 2012**

**led by Anh-Huong and Thu Nguyen**

**May 11-13, October 12-14 and December 7-9.**

From 6:00 pm Friday to 3:00 pm Sunday Practicing mindfulness in a rural setting for the whole weekend, together with a loving and supportive community.

#### **Days and Half Days of Mindfulness**

(see website for details)

**led by Anh-Huong and Thu Nguyen**

**Saturdays at the MPCF in Oakton, Virginia (in the Chapel) April 14 (all day), May 26 (all day), June 16 (all day), and June 23 (half day).**

## Special Classes and Events

(see the website for more information)

#### • **Day of Mindfulness in Baltimore**

March 31, 2012

#### • **Day of Mindfulness in Philadelphia**

April 21, 2012

### *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. Send submissions to Garrett Phelan [gjphelan@gmail.com](mailto:gjphelan@gmail.com)

### *Along the Path*

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Contributions are tax-deductible and may be sent to the above address.