

The SnowFlower Sun

November - December 2006

THE FIVE MINDFULNESS TRAININGS

Edward Celnicker

What is your practice? We usually answer in terms of the type of meditation we do. We say, “Oh, I do zazen or vipassana.” We do that because we live in America where, in general, we judge and are judged by what we do. And meditation is the most obvious thing Buddhists do. But Buddha said that practice is made up of three aspects: ethics (*sila* in Sanskrit), meditation (*dhyāna*), and insight (*prajna*), and he said that the three are intrinsically intertwined. Meditation alone is not enough. That is why SnowFlower Sangha is not just a meditation group.

Buddhist ethics is grounded in faith – not god given, nor proved by science – that certain behaviors, created by certain intentions, will have positive effects on oneself and on others. First one has to answer the question, “Do I care?” about yourself, others, life, the world. If so, how should we act?

The mindfulness trainings (or “precepts”) are not like the ten commandments: given by a wrathful god, in which noncompliance is tantamount to sin, requiring guilt and atonement, regret and denial, all of which lead to the low self-esteem that so many foreign religious leaders mention when they talk about Americans. Americans often feel negative towards the precepts because they seem to be a one-size-fits-all formula. They don’t seem to allow for the individual decision-making which is so important to us. But this is a misinterpretation.

The precepts are just guidelines to a happy life. They are very ancient and are part of the eight streams of merit together with the three refuges. Their original form is short and clear. Don’t:

1. kill
2. steal
3. commit adultery
4. lie
5. use intoxicants

They applied to the monastics as well as to lay-folk. Of course, they do require interpretation and certainly are culturally and time-relative. Thích has interpreted and rewritten them so that they make sense to us today.

In Thích’s rendering, three aspects of the precepts are fleshed out. Each precept contains:

1. awareness of suffering caused by wrong behavior
2. an impetus to avoid that behavior in the future
3. the determination to do something positive to heal the suffering

The root of “pre-cept” means “before” and “hold”: what you bring to each situation before you. There has always been a tension between literal interpretations and the underlying values. Recall the story of the two monks, one who saves the drowning woman, the other who admonishes him for touching a female. “But you are the one who is still carrying her,” the first says to the second.

No one is perfect. The mindfulness trainings can be our guidelines whether we take them formally or not. Taking them before our sangha brothers and sisters gives them more power and invites the support of others. We all will fail in our efforts now and then. But our commitment to the trainings makes us stronger all through the day. The more we can live them, the better our practice will be, the more stable our lives will be, the more in balance we will be. The Dalai Lama has said that his religion is kindness. The precepts help us be kind to ourselves and to others.

From The Miracle of Mindfulness!:

The Buddha once said that the problem of life itself is the problem of mindfulness. Whether or not one is alive depends on whether one is mindful.

NOVEMBER CALENDAR

Tuesday (7:00 – 8:30 PM)	Friday (7:00 – 9:00 PM)
	11/3 The Miracle of Mindfulness Led by Heather Mann
11/7 Practice Basics Led by Dave Haskin	11/10 Personal Reflections on <i>The Miracle of Mindfulness</i> Led by Erin Hanusa Held at Linda Jordan’s house 2811 Ridge Road
Saturday, 11/11 9 a.m. – 12 p.m. Inter-Sangha Half-Day of Mindfulness (sponsored by Buddhist Peace Fellowship) Madison Zen Center, 1820 Jefferson St. Contact Kathy Derene at 233-4118 or Connie Anderson at canderson@andersonkent.com	
11/14 Guided Meditation on Mindfulness Trainings & Discussion of Practicing the 1 st Training Led by Mary Gallagher	11/17 Verses for Daily Practice Sessions & 14 Trainings/Tiep Hien (Order of Interbeing) History and Guidelines for Membership Led by Dave Haskin and Jane Peckham
11/21 Practicing the 5 th Mindfulness Training Led by Heather Mann	11/24 Touching the Earth & Chants and Songs of Practice Led by Don Katz Please bring a blanket!
Monday, November 27 9:30 a.m. -12:30 p.m. Half-Day of Mindfulness at David Lawrence’s house (no brown bag lunch) call David at 832-6444 for more info	
11/28 Invoking the Bodhisattvas’ Names Led By Celeste Robins	

MEETING TIMES & LOCATIONS

We meet Tuesdays (7–8:30pm) in the Wesley Room of the Trinity United Methodist Church, 1123 Vilas Ave. (2 blocks west of Park St.). Enter through parking lot door on right (West) side of building. Go up the stairs, following the arrows to the Wesley Room. Note: a Greeter will be available until 7:15 p.m., after which time the doors will be locked per church policy.

We also meet Fridays (7–9 pm) in the Sanctuary of the Friends Meetinghouse, 1704 Roberts Court, near the Stadium in Madison. Please leave shoes in the hall. For both meetings, please try to arrive at 6:55pm (earlier if you can help set up) so that we can begin our sits in quiet.

SANGHA WEB SITE, E-MAIL LIST & NEWSLETTER

The SnowFlower Sangha web site is <http://SnowFlower.org>. You can subscribe to the SnowFlower listserv on the web or by sending an email to SnowFlower-subscribe@yahoogroups.com. Contact David Haskin with any questions (608-924-3060 or questions@SnowFlower.org). Mike Winckler maintains the web site. He can be reached at mwinckler@charter.net and mwinckler@matcmadison.edu. The SnowFlower Sun is published bimonthly and is edited by Erin Hanusa. Email Erin at erinhanusa@yahoo.com if you have announcements, articles, or other writing for the newsletter.

DECEMBER CALENDAR

Tuesday (7:00 – 8:30 PM)	Friday (7:00 – 9:00 PM)
	12/1 Stopping, Calming, Resting, and Healing Led by Mary Michal
12/5 Practice Basics Led by Mary Michal	12/8 Holiday Tea Ceremony Led by Mary Gallagher Please bring songs, instruments, poetry, music to share!
Saturday, 12/9 9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. Half-Day of Mindfulness at Karuna’s house (hosted by Jill Lynch) Bring a dish for a potluck following Call Jill at 832-6658 for more info	
12/12 Practicing the 2 nd Mindfulness Training Led by Linda Jordan	12/15 Personal Reflections on <i>The Miracle of Mindfulness</i> Led by Doreen Kunnert and Rosebud Sparer
12/19 Practicing the 4 th Mindfulness Training Led by Walt Keough	12/22 Journey to Plum Village Led by Karen Pluim and Melissa Thielman
12/26 New Year’s Ceremony Led by Don Katz	12/29 New Year’s Prayer to Our Ancestors (Blood Family and Spiritual Family) Led by Susan O’Leary and David Lawrence Bring photos of family and spiritual teachers

STILL HOLDING ON TO A SANGHA LIBRARY BOOK?

The following books need to inter-be with the sangha library. If you have one, please return it. Thank you! *The Blooming of a Lotus; The Heart of Understanding; Hermitage among the Cloud; The Moon Bamboo; The Path of Emancipation; The Pine Gate; The Raft Is Not the Shore; A Rose for Your Pocket; Stepping into Freedom; The Sun My Heart; The Sutra on the Eight Realizations of the Great Beings; A Taste of Earth and Other Legends of Vietnam; Touching Peace; Zen Keys*

LOVE AND UNDERSTANDING PROJECT

Steve Spiro

SnowFlower Sangha has presently collected almost \$8000 for Thây's Love and Understanding Project serving people in Vietnam. We are paired with and sponsoring at least two preschools of 30 children each. Each school requires \$120 a month to operate. The schools keep the children safe while both parents work at subsistence labor.

In the future, we may collect supplies to send to the schools we support. Our funds may also be earmarked for other projects yet to be named. It is the hope that we can create an improved informational presentation to help other U.S. sanghas become aware of the program.

The program is not just about generosity. It is also a sangha-building effort, both domestically and with our brothers and sisters overseas. Donation envelopes and forms are available at every sangha gathering. I will keep everyone updated on the progress of our ongoing support for this program.

N.B.: Discussion of whether the Love and Understanding Project should be an official SnowFlower activity is on the agenda for the next Care Taking Council meeting on Monday, November 13. Your comments are invited: Please email your thoughts to Dave H. (dhaskin@earthlink.net) or Jane (jmpeckham@tds.net), who will bring them to the CTC meeting.

TREASURER’S BRIEF

Melissa Thielman

Net earnings from retreat: \$1839

Current sangha treasury balance: \$3069

21ST CENTURY DHARMA: AN INVITATION FROM DAVE CRESWELL

On Sunday, December 17th, Dave Creswell will be leading the Madison Insight Meditation Group on the topic of 21st Century Dharma. A primary part of his sharing will be Thây's fourteen mindfulness trainings, as guidance from a superb modern master on how to stay true to the original dharma but also apply it to the realities of the modern world. Dave welcomes us to join their community and contribute to the discussion.

Madison Insight meets on Sundays from 6:00 to 8:00 PM at the Lower Meeting House of the First Unitarian Society on University Bay Drive. For more information, contact Dave at 238-1234.

NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION OPPORTUNITY: January 26 and 27, 2007

The Madison chapter of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship is sponsoring two days of practice and training in Nonviolent Communication (NVC) presented by Lucy Leu, who is one of the foremost teachers in NVC nationally as well as a long-time Buddhist practitioner. NVC is a practical and compatible practice tool that can help us with wise & loving speech.

For registration information, contact Melissa at thielman@tds.net. If you have additional questions, contact Jill at j.lynch@charter.net.

CALL FOR SUPPORT AND PARTICIPATION

If you are interested in planning or participating in the 2007 Buddhist Women's Conference: Women Voicing the Dharma, please contact info@dharmawomen.org or womenbcm@yahoo.com. The conference will be held at DePaul University in Chicago on February 24, 2007 and is sponsored by the Buddhist Council of the Midwest.

SNOWFLOWER HOLIDAY PARTY IN JANUARY

Our annual holiday party will take place Saturday, January 6 at 6:30 p.m. at Jim and Susan's house, 2220 West Lawn. There will be a sit followed by a potluck. Call 256-0506 for information.

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by Leigh Hancock

Six times a day
for the past two months,
in the rocker, on the sofa,
in lawnchairs on the porch,
wedged between two businessmen
on a flight to San Jose, cramped in the cab
of my father-in-law's truck, by the river, in a mall,
at the edges of festivals and movies,
we have settled in, Finn and I, his cheeks fluting
like a small bellows at a great fire, his eyes fluttering
like the most ephemeral of moths.

If I practiced the flute so often, I would be good.

If my garden received such attention, it would fruit
like the arbors of Catherine the Great, where her
pensive son Pavlosk wandered for hours.

If my breath stayed so steady,
my body so still and soft, and if I, and everyone else
gave life so freely day after day, would there be
a single problem in the world?

Contributed by Savitri Tsering