

The SnowFlower Sun

September and October 2007

Emotions

from Ed Celnicker's 7/27 dharma talk

"In the way that a gardener knows how to transform compost into flowers, we can learn the art of transforming anger, depression, and racial discrimination into love and understanding. This is the work of meditation." Thich Nhat Hanh

Many people think their emotions are passive reactions to events; even our language speaks of "falling" in love, being "overcome" with anger, feeling "depressed," people "making us annoyed." To a large extent, we manufacture and are responsible for our emotions.

Meditation and mindfulness help us slow down and give us time between emotional reaction and our behavior. But Buddhism says we can do more. We can train ourselves to diminish negative emotions and encourage positive ones.

Buddhism divides emotions into good ones and bad ones. The worst are known as the "three poisons": anger, greed, and ignorance. Ignorance means ignorance of the true nature of reality. Among the good ones we find love, compassion, equanimity, and joy (the four Brahmaviharas). The difference between these groups is practical. Bad ones lead to a basic vulnerability to suffering and pain, while good ones are conducive to happiness.

The path to take responsibility for one's emotions differs among Buddhist traditions. Most traditions start with quieting exercises and learning to identify one's emotions, habit energies, and the true nature of reality. At first this process focuses on "analytic meditation," with which we can see how and why emotions arise. But thinking is not enough, for ultimately we all have to gain insight, which is an understanding beyond thinking and language, to be able to see the true nature of reality. These moments of clarity generate the enthusiasm we need to be able to continue in our practice.

A major practice to weaken negative emotions is to develop the antidote of positive emotions. Practices to strengthen compassion, love, equanimity, and joy are common in almost all Buddhist traditions. These include metta meditations, social action, reflecting on interbeing, and recognizing the bad health effects of anger and hatred. There are also more direct practices to diminish negative emotions. The Tibetan tradition holds some practices that are adversarial in nature—declaring war on anger, for example—while other exercises are gentle, such as many which Thay suggests. All traditions agree that our emotions—positive and negative—are part of us, and that suppressing or denying them is fruitless.

In his book [Happiness: A Guide to Developing Life's Most Important Skill](#), Matthieu Ricard summarizes these process wonderfully:

"The search for happiness is not about looking at life through rose-colored glasses and blinding oneself to the pain and imperfections of the world. Nor is happiness a state of exaltation to be perpetuated at all costs. It is the purging of mental toxins such as hatred and obsession that literally poison the mind. It is also about putting things in perspective and reducing the gap between appearance and reality. To that end, we must acquire a better knowledge of how the mind works and a more accurate insight into the nature of things, for in its deepest sense suffering is intimately linked to a misapprehension of the nature of reality."

Read A READER'S RESPONSE to Ed's article on page four!

SEPTEMBER CALENDAR

Tuesday (7:00 – 8:30 PM)	Friday (7:00 – 9:00 PM)
9/4 Practice Basics Led by Heather Mann	9/7 The Elder Discourse Led by Mary Michal
Saturday, 9/8 3:00 – 5:45 Half-Day of Mindfulness at the Farm Zendo Simple potluck to follow from 5:45 – 6:30 p.m. Call 832-6658 for more information.	
9/11 Gatha on Impermanence Led by Susan Pearsall	9/14 The Anuradha Discourse Led by Jim Roseberry
9/18 Who Dies? Part 1 Led by Celeste Robins	9/21 Teaching to Be Given to the Sick Led by David Haskin
9/25 Who Dies? Part 2 Led by Celeste Robins	9/28 Measuring and Reflecting Led by Suzanne Kilkus
Saturday, 9/29 9:30 a.m. Roadside Cleanup in Mt. Vernon Coordinated by Beth Albert Meet at Mt. Vernon park parking lot at 9:30 a.m. Bring your own bag lunch and we'll eat afterwards at Pop's Knoll, Donald Park. Call 832-6658 for more information	

SEPTEMBER AND OCTOBER FRIDAY PRACTICE CALENDAR

Susan O'Leary

*Reciting the sutras
 Practicing the way of awareness
 Gives rise to benefits without limit.
 I vow to realize their true meaning.*

In September and October we will be studying discourses given by the Buddha. These sutras are chanted daily in Thich Nhat Hanh's monasteries. They are the source of much of Thay's teachings.

At first read, some of these can seem a bit dry, but they might become more accessible if you think about how these are the stories—out of decades of the Buddha's teachings—that people held onto and repeated in order to pass them down to the next generation. The discourses allow us to be there, listening to what the Buddha said.

The discourses generally start with something like "I heard these words of the Buddha..." and then describe when and where he spoke. These openings probably helped people to settle into listening or chanting. Many probably imagined what that scene looked like: the monastics gathered around the Buddha, the time of year and vegetation.

The rest of the discourses often take place through conversation. It might help to try to hear and see these people speaking as you read, or even to read the sutras out loud, trying to make them sound like conversation. These discourses speak to us today because they answer questions we continue to have: How can we remember to live in the present? How can we get along with each other? What is existence? What is death? What could help a friend—or myself—in facing death? How can I sustain myself spiritually?

All of the discourses we are studying can be found in the *Plum Village Chanting and Recitation Book*. Copies of the discourses will also be available on the web.

OCTOBER CALENDAR

Tuesday (7:00 – 8:30 PM)	Friday (7:00 – 9:00 PM)
10/2 Practice Basics Led by Don Katz	10/5 Youth and Happiness Led by Susan O’Leary
10/9 Discourse on Happiness Led by Matt Nunn	10/12 No sangha due to retreat
Friday, October 12 – Sunday, October 14 14th Annual Regional Retreat Bethel Horizons, Dodgeville See below for registration details.	
10/16 Right View Led by Lisa Glueck	10/19 The Middle Way Led by Cheri Maples
Saturday, 10/20 3:00 – 5:45 Half-Day of Mindfulness at Savitri’s house, 548 Gately Terrace. Potluck will follow at 5:45; soup and bread will be provided.	
10/23 Buddha Mind, Buddha Body Led by Maureen Brady	10/26 Taking Refuge in Oneself Led by Ed Celnicker
10/30 Recitation of the Five Mindfulness Trainings Led by Rich Bogdanow	

FALL RETREAT

The 14th Annual Regional Retreat, “The Wonderful Path of Practice,” will take place October 12-14 at Bethel Horizons in Dodgeville, led by regional dharma teachers Jack and Laurie Lawlor. Registration details are available by contacting David Haskin or Sarah Carroll. Please register by September 22.

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 Camp Randall Stadium. 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@gmail.com if you have announcements, articles, or other writing for the newsletter.

UPDATE: LOVE AND UNDERSTANDING PROJECT

The committee formed to help guide the Love and Understanding Project (LUP) has been moving ahead steadily since it received the strong support of the sangha at the recent business meeting. We are focusing much of our efforts on the upcoming retreat in Colorado. Through an individual donation, we have created a brochure that describes the program and that invites readers to contribute. We have also ordered 200 cloth shopping bags with the "LUP" logo on them, to be sold as part of the fundraising efforts.

We are looking forward to meeting with Sr. Chan Khong at the Estes Park retreat to discuss ways we can help the program. We will also be meeting practitioners from other sanghas, and from other regions of the country, who may wish to join the efforts to raise awareness about and funds for the program.

Sangha members of the Love and Understanding Project Group are Nora Cashin, Sarah Carroll, Ed Celnicker, Efrat Livny, Mary Michal, Susan O'Leary, Jon Reed and Steve Spiro. We are enthusiastic about our sangha's support of this important opportunity to practice *dana* and support Thay's work in Vietnam.

GREETERS NEEDED FOR FRIDAY NIGHT SANGHA MEETING

Susan O'Leary

We have talked for a while in sangha about having greeters for newcomers at Friday night meetings. Could you volunteer to come fifteen minutes early on a Friday and be available at the door of the sanctuary to say hello to people you think might be new, show them the newcomer materials (they're usually put on the piano bench), and answer any questions? Please email me with dates you would be available if you could.

You can refer to the calendars on pages 2 and 3 (thanks to the friends who volunteered to lead in September and October) to know what topic is what night in thinking about volunteering.

A READER'S RESPONSE to "Emotions," page 1

As a friend of mine put it, our minds by nature produce thoughts and our heart, emotions. This is their nature and to stop thoughts and emotions makes us zombies. When we recognize and accept them for what they are, we are not overwhelmed and swept away by their power. We see that they come and go, contain no lasting substance, and that we only empower them when we identify with them, rather than observing and remembering our sense of being which has no name or form. (*Buddhist suchness—Ed.*) In our life, we can use thoughts and emotions much like we would use a tool. In the same way that we might use a thorn to remove a thorn, we can use our quiet awareness to be free of useless or disturbing thoughts. We can either reject further involvement in what we are thinking or feeling if we see no purpose in it, or we can assent and allow what is happening to unfold without resistance. (According to our habits of mind, which are the direct result of previous thoughts and emotions we have had, we see life either as an opportunity to learn and grow, or as a world of disappointment because it rarely lives up to our expectations.)