

The SnowFlower Sun

May - June 2006

Suffering Is Not Enough

Excerpt from Lisa Glueck's dharma talk on April 21st, 2006

Suffering is a big topic in Buddhism. The first of the Four Noble Truths is the truth of suffering. As Thây points out, the way this truth has been interpreted since the Buddha's passing has varied widely.

Buddha's teachings were passed down orally for about four hundred years before they were written down. Even during the lifetime of the Buddha, [it is likely that] only a limited number of his followers had a deep and complete understanding of all his teachings.

As time passed and various monks passed along the oral tradition, the transmission was at least partially dependent upon the [depth of] understanding of each monk. A word or two here and there [could easily be] changed, possibly distorting the original meaning in profound ways. Just think of the game "telephone" in which children sit in a circle and whisper a message from one to the next until it comes full circle.

So what's a modern day Buddhist supposed to do? Who do we believe when there are so many contrasting interpretations? Thây wisely suggests that we read widely among the discourses and deepen our understanding of the true heart of the teachings through our practice. As our experience of our true nature deepens, we'll know intuitively which teachings ring true.

Thây feels that the teachings about suffering have been distorted over the centuries. The first noble truth has often been interpreted as "life is suffering" or "all compounded things are suffering." This kind of interpretation has led to the false [view] that Buddhism is a gloomy religion with an overemphasis on negativity.

I love Thây's rearrangement of the Four Noble Truths:

1. Well Being (traditionally number 3, cessation of suffering)
2. Noble Eightfold Path that leads to Well-Being (traditionally number 4)
3. Suffering (traditionally number 1)
4. The Ignoble Eightfold Path That Leads to Suffering (traditionally number 2, the arising of suffering)

This new arrangement of the Four Noble Truths supports Thây's emphasis that suffering is not enough. We must learn to touch the beautiful and healing elements of life.

I also enjoy Thây's objection to the often-quoted teaching that the Three Dharma Seals are:

1. Impermanence
2. Non-self
3. Suffering

He rightly observes that impermanence and non-self are universal. They are a "mark" of all things. Suffering is not. It is easy to see that a table is impermanent and does not have a self separate of all non-table elements (wood, rain, furniture maker and so on) but is it suffering?

A table will only make us suffer if we attribute permanence or separateness to it. When we are attached to a certain table, it is not the table that causes us to suffer. It is our attachment. It's easy to see that anger is impermanent, non-self and filled with suffering. But it's strange to think of a table or a flower as filled with suffering. The Buddha taught impermanence and non-self to help us not be caught in signs.

I agree with Thây that it's easier to envision a state where there are no obstacles created by concepts than to see all things as suffering. He calls the Three Dharma Seals impermanence, non-self and nirvana. Now that

MAY CALENDAR

Tuesday (7:00 - 8:30 PM)	Friday (7:00 - 9:00 PM)
5/2 Practice Basics led by Heather Mann	5/5 Practicing the Tenth Mindfulness Training led by Susan O’Leary
Monday, 5/8 from 9:30am - 12:30pm Half-Day of Mindfulness Vipassana Style Rounds of 45-minute sitting and 10-minute walking meditation, at The Farm’s new Zendo No bag lunch; Call 832-6444 for more information	
5/9 Humility led by Lisa Glueck	5/12 Happiness and our Signature Strengths led by Jon Reed
Monday, 5/15 from 6:35pm - 8:00pm Care-Taking Council at Jane Peckham’s. Call 829-2466 for directions if you’d like to attend to present concerns / questions about Sangha.	
5/16 Mindful Speech led by Jill Lynch	5/19 Panel discussion on being with the dying - Suzanne Kilkus, Moderator, Margot Kennard, David Lawrence and Marianne Benforado
Saturday, 5/20 from 9:30am - 1:00pm Half-Day of Mindfulness at The Farm’s new Zendo; Bring bag lunch; Call 832-6658 for more information	
5/23 Three Refuges led by Edward Celnicker	5/26 Faith (first sit - 7:05 to 7:30; second sit - 8:35 to 9:00) led by Edward Celnicker
Monday, 5/27 from 9:30am - 12:00pm Roadside Clean-up; Meet at Mount Vernon Park Brown bag lunch to follow; Call (608) 832-6444 for more info	
5/30 Five Remembrances: How They Started led by Karuna Namenwirth	

SANGHA WEB SITE & E-MAIL LIST

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. David Haskin currently maintains the mailing lists. Contact him 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.

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 side of building, go through double door to right, turn left to go upstairs, and Wesley is on the right. *NOTE:* All entrances locked at 7:30pm per church policy.

We also meet Fridays (7-9 pm) in the Sanctuary of the Friend’s Meetinghouse, 1704 Roberts Court, near the Stadium in Madison (straight ahead after entering, leave coat and shoes in the hall). For both, please try to arrive at 6:55pm so that we can begin our sits in quiet (earlier if you can help set up).

JUNE CALENDAR

Tuesday (7:00 - 8:30 PM)	Friday (7:00 - 9:00 PM)
	6/2 Extended meditation (3 sits) and recitation of the Mindfulness Trainings led by David Lawrence
Monday, 6/5 from 9:30 am - 12:30 am Half-Day of Mindfulness in Vipassana Style Rounds of 45-minute sitting and 10-minute walking meditation, at The Farm’s Zendo No bag lunch; Call 832-6444 for more information	
6/6 Practice Basics led by Celeste Robins	6/9 Non-duality, Inclusiveness, and Non-fear led by Karuna Namenwirth
Saturday, 6/10 from 9:30am-12:30pm Buddhist Peace Fellowship Half-Day of Mindfulness hosted by SnowFlower Sangha - “Reflections on Thich Nhat Hahn’s understanding of Interbeing as it relates to Engaged Buddhism” (followed by brown bag lunch) at The Farm’s Zendo; Car-pooling is encouraged; Call Jill Lynch at 245-1399	
6/13 Topic TBD led by Don Katz	6/16 Suffering led by Don Katz
Saturday, 6/17 Jack & Laurie Lawlor’s annual picnic for the Regional Sanghas - details to be announced	
6/20 Tea Ceremony led by Kathleen Caron	6/23 Watering the Seeds of Joy led by Cheri Maples
6/27 Recitation of the Five Mindfulness Trainings led by Anne Forbes	6/30 Deep listening and nursing (first sit - 7:05 to 7:30; second sit - 8:35 to 9:00) led by Diane Lauver

A GENTLE REMINDER

Please come to Sangha as scent-free as possible as there are members who are sensitive to perfumes, colognes, and scented laundry products. Scents can make some folks ill, so sitting scent-free supports everyone’s wellness.

NOTICE OF ANNUAL MEETING:
 The annual SnowFlower Business Meeting is set for Monday, July 17, from 7:00 pm - 8:30 p.m. at Friends Meetinghouse. Please mark your calendars.

My Journey to the Order of Interbeing

Contributed by Savitri (True Beautiful Peace)

In the early 1990's, at the second Thây retreat in Northern Illinois, Arnie Kotler asked if anyone was interested in taking the 14 Mindfulness Trainings. I had taken the Five Trainings at the first Northern Illinois retreat and when Arnie asked that, a small voice in me said 'yes'. But I did not say anything out loud. It seemed a bit ambitious at the time and I felt my practice needed to be stronger for me to make such a commitment. So, that voice retreated.

My upbringing was Catholic through and through: Catholic grade school and high school, big family, lots of aunts, uncles, and cousins. My spiritual search began during my junior year in high school. I questioned the faith in which I was raised, wanting I know not what; "more" is how it felt. That questioning led me to explore various religious traditions in my college course work and to take a Junior Year Abroad in India. After college, I worked at an alternative pre-school and kindergarten where the staff practiced meditation and chanting together. We incorporated visualizations and meditation into our work with the children. It was during this period that I first encountered Thich Nhat Hanh.

Still, I found myself wandering without firm ground, my practice was not anchored. The young SnowFlower Sangha gave me a spiritual family that was there for me as I sought my way--always welcoming but never holding me too tight. This allowed me the space to sort through the experiences of my childhood faith tradition and to begin to embody my spiritual experience as an adult. My marriage and my job further anchored me to the world and I was asked to live what I valued. The Five Mindfulness Trainings became my blueprint.

By the late 90's and into 2000, I felt truly anchored in Thây's practice. This occurred because of the practical wholesome simple truth I found in his style. The incredible wisdom available in Buddhist psychology allowed me to wander safely through a great deal of mental confusion and helped me find life in the present moment. The first three of the Fourteen Trainings were a source of powerful refuge when my parents' views narrowed. They have also steadied me when my own tendencies moved me to cling too tightly to my perceptions of how things ought to be.

The foundations of Thây's practice--mindful breathing and movement, deep listening and compassionate speech--are truly all we need. The Five and the Fourteen Trainings place these practices in the context of life experience. When I am caught in a web of mind that yearns to know what is "right" in challenging situations, the broad range of experiences that the Fourteen offer are my guideposts.

For me, taking refuge in the Fourteen Trainings has strengthened my commitment as a lay practitioner to walk in clarity and wisdom on this earth. It has been like my roots have gone deeper into the soil of life. Making public my commitment to the Trainings was an important experience for me. It felt right to take that step before giving birth to our child. Even though we don't know where life will take us, with the Trainings as refuge, my heart knows where we are going.

Call for Editor

Requested by Sarah Carroll

Ever wanted to collaborate on the content for a newsletter? Over the last two years, I've enjoyed working with Karuna and the leaders and schedulers of Snowflower Sangha to create this bimonthly newsletter. My work schedule occasionally makes completing the newsletter difficult, however. I invite others who may be interested in this role to take or share the lead. This is an opportunity for other styles and voices to be reflected.

If you have computer skills, a passion for writing and for Snowflower Sangha, and have some time once every two months to devote to designing content, collecting contributions, and formatting the newsletter, please contact me at sarahcarroll@yahoo.com.