

The SnowFlower Sun

November and December 2011

HAPPINESS

Heather Mann

Happiness is difficult to define. It is not a feeling charged with excitement or high spirits because those are temporary states of mind in the river of human emotions. I like to think of happiness as a sustained joy, a personal contentment. It is a state of being that takes pleasure from the nurturing elements in the world around us. It has a quality of stability. It is a deep satisfaction and gladness for life. Happiness is a sense of peace with the world, a comfort in our own skin. If we live above the spirit-eroding condition of poverty, happiness has nothing to do with our standard of living. Instead, happiness is a state of being available to nearly all people.

Unlike other spiritual traditions that promise happiness in the afterlife, the Buddha realized that joy is possible in the here and now. He went on to describe the path to achieve happiness. The beauty of this joyful state, he said, is that happiness arises naturally when suffering ends because human beings are naturally happy. Our true selves are happy.

The Four Noble Truths identified by the Buddha tell us that everyone suffers, there is a cause for our suffering, we can end our suffering, and there is a path to avoid suffering. The Five Mindfulness Trainings are the tools he gave to us to identify the causes of our suffering. We access happiness through the study, practice, and observation of the Trainings. They help us differentiate between things wholesome and unwholesome, thereby helping us to avoid pain.

They teaches us that our store consciousness—the mind that lies just below the level of our awareness—has all the seeds of happiness and suffering. When life waters our seeds of anger, craving, jealousy, or doubt, we have the chance to acknowledge the suffering and diffuse its power with the light of mindful awareness. The unwholesome seed loses even more energy when we water wholesome seeds of compassion or loving kindness.

In this way we can be gardeners of our happiness. As we practice the Five Mindfulness Trainings, Right View matures. We possess Right View when we are smart enough to know that we are suffering and when we can distinguish wholesome from unwholesome seeds. With Right View, we can mindfully water the real seeds of happiness in our garden.

Skillful gardening takes time. It takes chronological time for us to figure out wholesome from unwholesome, and it takes a commitment of time to practice daily. We must dedicate a certain quantity of time before we experience benefits from the quality of time. The more mindful we are throughout the day, the more we nurture Right View. The stronger our Right View, the more talented we grow as gardeners of happiness. It helps if we remove clutter, noise, and distraction from our life. It helps if we meditate every day and practice looking deeply.

The Buddha and scientists agree that there are a number of additional things we can do to cultivate happiness. We can give ourselves direct experiences of the world. Regular contact with nature gives us both the sacred experience of the uncensored world and the physical experience of immersing our

senses in something grand, open, and impermanent. In addition, a life that seeks out beauty through friendships, art, poetry, and literature waters seeds of happiness. Learning new skills and increasing self-sufficiency further cultivate joy, as does filling our days with tasks that are intrinsically rewarding. It is also essential to recognize happiness as relational.

They wrote the Five Mindfulness Trainings to reflect the fact that happiness is not an individual matter. Non-killing, loving kindness, generosity, right speech, deep listening, care in safeguarding our intimate relationships, and maintaining a proper diet for the transformation of society all speak to the truth of our interdependence with community. By taking loving care of each other, we nurture of our own happiness.

The Five Mindfulness Trainings help us differentiate between what is wholesome and what is unwholesome. We practice the Trainings to see the roots of our suffering, and to diffuse and end the causes of suffering. With that, the stability of happiness naturally fills our being.

SANGHA TOPICS IN NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER

The Buddha and Thich Nhat Hanh offer us many teachings on gratitude and generosity. ‘Tis the season to enjoy many insights on these practices in both Tuesday and Friday night meetings for the next two months.

NOVEMBER CALENDAR

Tuesday (7:00 – 8:30 PM)	Friday (7:00 – 9:00 PM)
<p>11/1 Flower Watering: Living an Appreciative Life Don Katz</p>	<p>11/4 6:30 p.m.: Intro to Thich Nhat Hanh and Sangha Don Katz 7:00: Recitation of the Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings Karen Reppen</p>
<p>11/8 The Five Contemplations Suzanne Kilkus</p>	<p>11/11 <i>Dana</i> David Haskin</p>
<p>11/15 Extended Sit and Metta Meditation Karuna Namenwirth and Mary Michal</p>	<p>11/18 Compassionate Speech Linda Jordan</p>
<p>Saturday, 11/19, 3:00–5:30 p.m. Half-day of Mindfulness Followed by a potluck Hosted by Janet Zimmerman, 85 Oak Creek Trail (off Westwood Rd.) (608) 345-9678</p>	
<p>11/22 Recitation of the Mindfulness Trainings Cheri Maples</p>	<p>11/25 Cultivating Gratitude Maureen Brady</p>
<p>11/29 Opening Our Hearts to All Beings Lisa Glueck</p>	

DECEMBER CALENDAR

Tuesday (7:00 – 8:30 PM)	Friday (7:00 – 9:00 PM)
	12/2 True Pride Elizabeth Galewski
12/6 6:30 p.m.: Intro to Thich Nhat Hanh and Sangha Karen Reppen 7:00: Generosity: The First Practice and the First Perfection Walt Keough	12/9 Awakening Joy and Generosity With a Twist of Roseberry Jim Roseberry
12/13 Cultivating Gratitude Maureen Brady	12/16 Ancestors Prayer Susan O’Leary
12/20 The Bodhisattvas and the Diamond Sutra Larry Mandt	12/23 The Five Contemplations Suzanne Kilkus
12/27 Ancestors Prayer Mary Gallagher and Karuna Namenwirth	12/30 Awakening Joy and the Practice of Gratitude Mary Michal
Saturday, 12/31, 9:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. Half Day of Mindfulness Followed by a potluck Don Katz and Rebecca Krantz’s house, 2116 Jefferson St. donbkatz@gmail.com or (608) 260-8575	

SANGHA CANCELLATION POLICY

In case of inclement weather, an email will be sent to the listserv by 3:00 p.m. the day of sangha.

DWELLING IN THE DIVINE ABODE

Carol Rubin

Last night, I experienced the Divine Abode. I attended, along with 200 others, the first annual Awards Banquet sponsored by Vision Beyond Bars, a Madison organization established by and for formerly incarcerated individuals. The attendees include the formerly incarcerated individuals receiving awards for having transformed their lives, those who ministered to them inside and outside prison, the volunteers who opened their hearts to them inside and outside the concrete walls, their recently released comrades, families and friends, and, surprisingly, some of the law officers who arrested them, the judges who sentenced them, the wardens who oversaw their incarceration, and even the Madison Chief of Police and the Secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Corrections.

What happened last night was uniquely powerful. The room, the space, the very atmosphere was permeated with the four Brahmaviharas: loving kindness, joy, compassion, and equanimity. The loving kindness was a pervasive warmth flowing throughout the room, as individual men and women held, hugged, encouraged, and thanked those who had helped them. The universal joy of the attendees, the award recipients, and the many others in the room who somehow found a way home after incarceration, was palpable. Every heart was open and quivering with compassion as we heard

stories of the many types of suffering that had been experienced and alleviated. Underlying it all was equanimity, acceptance of the pain and suffering so many had caused and experienced, directly or indirectly—but not a word of bitterness, anger, or fear.

This is how our world can be, and why I have chosen to work with those imprisoned or recently released from prison: because transformation, small or large, is possible, and loving kindness, joy, compassion, and equanimity are our allies.

SHOVELING SNOW WITH THE BUDDHA

BILLY COLLINS

In the usual iconography of the temple or the local Wok
you would never see him doing such a thing,
tossing the dry snow over a mountain
of his bare, round shoulder,
his hair tied in a knot,
a model of concentration.

Sitting is more his speed, if that is the word
for what he does, or does not do.

Even the season is wrong for him.
In all his manifestations, is it not warm or slightly humid?
Is this not implied by his serene expression,
that smile so wide it wraps itself around the waist of the universe?

But here we are, working our way down the driveway,
one shovelful at a time.
We toss the light powder into the clear air.
We feel the cold mist on our faces.
And with every heave we disappear
and become lost to each other
in these sudden clouds of our own making,
these fountain-bursts of snow.

This is so much better than a sermon in church,
I say out loud, but Buddha keeps on shoveling.
This is the true religion, the religion of snow,
and sunlight and winter geese barking in the sky,
I say, but he is too busy to hear me.

He has thrown himself into shoveling snow
as if it were the purpose of existence,
as if the sign of a perfect life were a clear driveway
you could back the car down easily
and drive off into the vanities of the world
with a broken heater fan and a song on the radio.

All morning long we work side by side,
me with my commentary
and he inside his generous pocket of silence,
until the hour is nearly noon
and the snow is piled high all around us;
then, I hear him speak.

After this, he asks,
can we go inside and play cards?

Certainly, I reply, and I will heat some milk
and bring cups of hot chocolate to the table
while you shuffle the deck.
and our boots stand dripping by the door.

Aaah, says the Buddha, lifting his eyes
and leaning for a moment on his shovel
before he drives the thin blade again
deep into the glittering white snow.