

The SnowFlower Sun

July and August 2011

DISCOURSE ON HAPPINESS

Rachel Murray

In his dharma talks, Thay has said that a person is happy who is free from views, including views on happiness. Our views of what we need to be happy can be the obstacles to that very happiness that we want. In other words, there is no prescriptive goal for happiness. It is a moment-to-moment opportunity. An opportunity to be skillful and practice. An opportunity to realize and be grateful. An opportunity to live.

The Discourse on Happiness (the Mahamangala Sutta from the ancient Pali canon) is the Buddha's 11-verse answer to a question he was once asked. "Many gods and men are eager to know what are the greatest blessings which bring about a peaceful and happy life. Tathagata, will you teach us?"

The Buddha's "answers" appear to me to be wonderfully spacious, allowing curiosity, opportunity, and choice. Here is a summary of several of them: *Having a chance to learn and grow; planting good seeds; avoiding unwholesome actions, not caught by alcoholism or drugs.* Now, for the latter, he does not say abstaining from, but not caught by, drugs, sugar, sex, Internet, etc. I often have a vivid image of myself standing on a high-desert mountain plateau, safe and able to see clearly all around me for miles. The greatest happiness is not that I am sober, but that I am actually alive, that I am no longer caught.

To be humble and polite in manner, grateful and content with a simple life. Thay does not write that having a simple life is the greatest happiness, but to be grateful and content with a simple life. I have heard people returning from two weeks in a third-world country exclaim, "They have nothing, but they are so happy! We should all live like that." I wonder. The choice to be grateful and contented seems to be central. This is followed by: *Not missing the occasion to learn the Dharma.* Fortunately, not missing the occasion is likewise a joyful opportunity that repeatedly presents itself.

To persevere and be open to change. Change itself is not happiness, but being open to change. Being open to change means finding ways to be flexible, playful, and creative in a world that we cannot control. In my own life, the opportunities to persevere and be open to change, forced though they may have been, were truly invaluable. While I had to accept certain inevitable consequences of my actions, being open to change helped me to transform certain perceptions and perspectives. Locked in a state mental hospital, and later in jail, as a result of my drinking became "I'm going to the spa." A bit of a stretch maybe, but in fact I built a birdhouse, learned Pilates, taught myself origami, even won lavender bath salts at Friday night bingo. Sounds like a spa to me. Today those experiences let in happiness in the form of equanimity and even-mindedness during my day. If I lock the keys in the car or don't get the job I apply for, I don't mind that much—an enormous and repeating blessing. I once heard someone say that you can be happy inside, regardless of which side of the bars you are on.

To live in the world, with your heart undisturbed by the world, with all sorrows ended, dwelling in peace, this is the greatest happiness. For he who accomplishes this, unvanquished wherever she goes, always he is safe and happy. Happiness lives within oneself.

TUESDAY SANGHA TOPICS IN JULY AND AUGUST

On Tuesdays in July and August we will engage in a “summer selection” of topics, an eclectic mix to help us remain steady during a season when normal routines can get thrown off. Members of the sangha will lead us in dharma reflections, thoughts on the challenges that we may face, and our ancient practices. Whatever our comings and goings this summer, Tuesday evenings with SnowFlower remain a calm anchorage of mindfulness.

FRIDAY SANGHA TOPICS IN JULY AND AUGUST

Summer often brings a sense of freedom: fresh air, sunshine, birds, and flowers beckon. Thay’s book *Be Free Where You Are* is based on talks Thay gave to inmates at the Maryland Correctional Institution. Some of our summer talks will be loosely based on chapters from that book, which encourage us to focus on being truly free.

We will also have a chance to explore an evening of extended silence on July 29. Sits will be about 30 minutes. There will be no dharma talk on this evening.

JULY CALENDAR

Tuesday (7:00 – 8:30 PM)	Friday (7:00 – 9:00 PM)
	<p style="text-align: center;">7/1 6:30 p.m.: Intro to Thich Nhat Hanh and Sangha David Haskin 7:00: Compassion as a Liberating Factor Mary Michal</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">7/5 Compassion as a Door to Liberation Mary Michal</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">7/8 Walking Meditation Jane Peckham</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">7/12 Extended Sitting Meditation Practice Maureen Brady</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">7/15 The Energy of Liberation Cheri Maples</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Saturday, 7/16 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., followed by a potluck Half Day of Mindfulness with practice Karuna and Micha Namenwirth’s, the Farm. For directions: bnamenwirth@yahoo.com.</p> <hr style="border-top: 1px dashed black;"/> <p style="text-align: center;">Summer Day of Mindfulness starting at 9:00 a.m. led by dharma teachers Jack and Laurie Lawlor and sponsored by the Mindfulness Community of Milwaukee at the DeKoven Center by Lake Michigan. For more information and to register, call (414) 962-8678.</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">7/19 The Bell in Sangha and in Daily Life Micha Namenwirth</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">7/22 Recitation of the Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings Maureen Brady</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">7/26 The Ocean Buddha Heather Mann</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">7/29 Practice Evening of Extended Silence Carol Rubin <i>Sits will be about 30 minutes. No dharma talk.</i></p>

AUGUST CALENDAR

Tuesday (7:00 – 8:30 PM)	Friday (7:00 – 9:00 PM)
8/2 6:30 p.m.: Intro to Thich Nhat Hanh and Sangha Steven Spiro 7:00: The Sun My Heart Elliott Graham	8/5 Cultivating Freedom Don Katz
8/9 Self-forgiveness (One Mistake After Another) Don Katz	8/12 Smiling at Habit Energy David Haskin
Saturday, 8/13 3:00 to 5:30 p.m., followed by a potluck Half Day of Mindfulness with metta practice Karuna and Micha Namenwirth’s, the Farm. For directions: bnamenwirth@yahoo.com .	
8/16 Mindfulness, Habits, and the Creativity of Action Rebecca Krantz	8/19 Zen and the Art of Bicycle Riding Jon Reed
8/23 Catholicism and the Dharma Gloria Green	8/26 Practice Gems From the Colorado Retreat Steve Fleck
8/30 Never Disparaging, Never Underestimating: The Way of Sadaparibhuta Susan Pearsall	

CHECK OUT THE NEW SNOWFLOWER WEBSITE!

SnowFlower’s web team has been working hard to update our website, and now the fruits of their labors are ours for the picking. Tsela Barr, David Haskin, Susan Hessel, Linda Jordan, and Don Katz all contributed time and effort to the new site. Susan Hessel and Don Katz will serve as webmasters. Visit the new site at www.snowflower.org.

UPCOMING MEETINGS

Steering Council: August 31
 Schedulers Council: September 9
 Caretaking Council: September 11

SNOWFLOWER SANGHA’S 20TH ANNIVERSARY

During the early fall, SnowFlower Sangha will celebrate its 20th anniversary. One celebratory idea is to have a tea ceremony with time for folks to offer their “SnowFlower stories.” This could take place at both a Tuesday and a Friday sangha, with the sitting and walking shorter to allow time for the party. If you have a suggestion, please let the schedulers for this time period know. Friday’s is Steve Fleck and Tuesday’s is Savitri Tsering.

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.

Ithaca

When you set out on your journey to Ithaca,
pray that the road is long,
full of adventure, full of knowledge.
The Lestrygonians and the Cyclops,
the angry Poseidon — do not fear them:
You will never find such as these on your path,
if your thoughts remain lofty, if a fine
emotion touches your spirit and your body.
The Lestrygonians and the Cyclops,
the fierce Poseidon you will never encounter,
if you do not carry them within your soul,
if your soul does not set them up before you.

Pray that the road is long.
That the summer mornings are many, when,
with such pleasure, with such joy
you will enter ports seen for the first time;
stop at Phoenician markets,
and purchase fine merchandise,
mother-of-pearl and coral, amber and ebony,
and sensual perfumes of all kinds,
as many sensual perfumes as you can;
visit many Egyptian cities,
to learn and learn from scholars.

Always keep Ithaca in your mind.
To arrive there is your ultimate goal.
But do not hurry the voyage at all.
It is better to let it last for many years;
and to anchor at the island when you are old,
rich with all you have gained on the way,
not expecting that Ithaca will offer you riches.

Ithaca has given you the beautiful voyage.
Without her you would have never set out on the road.
She has nothing more to give you.

And if you find her poor, Ithaca has not deceived you.
Wise as you have become, with so much experience,
you must already have understood what Ithacas mean.

Constantine P. Cavafy