

The SnowFlower Sun

September and October 2011

THE BELL AT SANGHA AND AT HOME

Micha Namenwirth

[Thay says the bell is a friend that helps us attain enlightenment. —Ed.]

About 15 years ago Karuna and I were living in a small town in Belgium. At one point, the local sangha meetings were held in our house. For a while I resisted joining. I remember sitting in my study one afternoon, busy with my own work, when I heard the sound of the mindfulness bell coming from the sangha meeting in the living room. This intrigued me. I walked over and have been a sangha member ever since.

The bell is the bell of mindfulness, the “voice of the Buddha.” Hence it is approached with respect and love by the bell master and by the sangha. The bell is like a living being; thus we wake it and invite it, not ring or strike it. The bell may be understood in three aspects: the spiritual, the ceremonial, and as a musical instrument. As far as the spiritual aspect, listening to the bell is a form of meditation in and of itself. The sound of the bell brings us into the spiritual (religious and devotional) realm. The bell is an instrument used in our spiritual practice. Secondly, the ceremonial/ritualistic function of the bell. The bell symbolizes Buddhist practice. I remember a solemn meeting of different religions where we were represented by Susan O’Leary. Instead of talking about Buddhist practice, she walked slowly on to the stage mindfully carrying the large bell. She invited it. The sight and the sound, which symbolized our Buddhist community, clearly made a deep impression on all those present.

Thirdly, the bell is a musical instrument similar to other percussion instruments in the symphonic orchestra. Obviously, small bells have a high pitch, larger bells a lower, deeper pitch, just like chimes or the carillon in a church bell tower. The somewhat diffuse sound of bells and chimes is produced by the particular series of overtones, which differ markedly from, say, an oboe or a clarinet.

Similar to other musical instruments, some practice is needed to obtain satisfying results. This is apparent when the bell master tries to replicate the first sound he or she has already made, or when the bell master tries to produce an identical or near-identical sound to what he or she had in mind. How is it done? As with piano or violin instruction, there doesn’t seem to be a single right or wrong method. We each have to find out what works for us. What I do is concentrate, breathe slowly and consciously, feel deep respect, and then waken and invite. I listen to the sound, let it penetrate and take hold of me. I rejoice in the quiet and peace, appreciate the non-verbal communication.

We all know that mindfulness practice is best not limited to Tuesday and Friday nights. The bell helps us to remember to be mindful at home or even at work. When trying to be mindful as you perform chores and duties or when sitting in meditation on your own at home, the bell helps enormously to stop, to focus, and to be truly attentive in the here and now. If invited before meals, the bell is especially effective to help us eat in mindfulness. I have a small bell on my desk and use it to remind me that life is more than thinking, writing, and reading.

“Listen, listen, this wonderful sound brings me back to my true self.”

ANNUAL SNOWFLOWER RETREAT IN OCTOBER

SnowFlower Sangha’s annual retreat will take place at Bethel Horizons in Dodgeville from Friday, October 21, to Sunday, October 23. Dharma teachers Cheri Maples and Jack Lawlor will lead the retreat. The retreat cost is \$190 and includes lodging and delicious vegetarian meals. Scholarships are available. For more information on the retreat, contact Walt Keough. If you would like to apply for a scholarship, contact Karuna Namenwirth.

SEPTEMBER CALENDAR

Tuesday (7:00 – 8:30 PM)	Friday (7:00 – 9:00 PM)
	<p style="text-align: center;">9/2 6:30 p.m.: Intro to Thich Nhat Hanh and Sangha Jim Roseberry 7:00: SnowFlower 20th Anniversary Tea Ceremony Schuhchen Guo and Susan O'Leary</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">9/6 SnowFlower 20th Anniversary Tea Ceremony Schuhchen Guo and Lisa Glueck</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">9/9 The Five Hindrances Cheri Maples</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">9/13 Estes Park Reminiscences Celeste Robins and Bonnie Trudell</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">9/16 The Three Poisons Steve Fleck</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Saturday, 9/16 3:00 p.m. to 5:30 p.m., followed by a potluck Half Day of Mindfulness at Heather and Dave Mann's 5841 Woods Edge Road, Madison 53711 heather.lyn.mann@gmail.com</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">9/20 The Anumana Sutta: Measuring and Reflecting Dave and Heather Mann</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">9/23 Not Acting When Triggered Becca Krantz</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">9/27 Self-forgiveness (One Mistake After Another) Don Katz</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">9/30 Process Models and Community Don Katz</p>

TUESDAY SANGHA TOPICS IN SEPTEMBER AND OCTOBER

Tuesdays in September and October are a simple offering of gratitude and basic practices. For those of you who love silence, and for those of you growing more fond of it, we will offer an evening of extended sitting where in lieu of a dharma discussion there will be an additional round of sitting on October 4. The inner focus of seasons changing is looked at as well in at October with the practice of the Five Remembrances. Hearing of our friends' journey to see Thay in the Rockies, sharing tea in honor of our sangha's birth, and learning to love ourselves and all beings more fully round out the schedule for these months on Tuesday evenings. Please join us!

FRIDAY SANGHA TOPICS IN SEPTEMBER AND OCTOBER

On Friday evenings in September and October, we will explore what the dharma offers us concerning conflict. What are the sources of conflict? How can we steer clear of conflict? How can we resolve conflict, so that we experience ease and peace within ourselves, and so that our sangha is harmonious and strong? We hope you can be with us, as these are considered essential teachings.

OCTOBER CALENDAR

Tuesday (7:00 – 8:30 PM)	Friday (7:00 – 9:00 PM)
10/4 6:30 p.m.: Intro to Thich Nhat Hanh and Sangha Celeste Robins 7:00: Extended Sitting Mary Michal	10/7 Thich Nhat Hanh's Peace Treaty, Neuroscience, and Conscious-Relationship Models Suzanne Kilkus
10/11 Metta Maureen Brady	10/14 The Five Mindfulness Trainings Jane Peckham and Steve Fleck
10/18 Transitions: The Five Remembrances Michael Helt	10/21 NO SANGHA
Friday, 10/21, through Sunday, 10/23 Annual SnowFlower Retreat Bethel Horizons, Dodgeville, WI With dharma teachers Jack Lawlor and Cheri Maples	
10/25 The Five Mindfulness Trainings Walt Keough	10/28 Topic TBA Steven Spiro

SNOWFLOWER 20TH ANNIVERSARY TEA CEREMONIES

Please join in the tea ceremony to celebrate the joy we've shared in SnowFlower Sangha. Traditionally we bring a favorite sangha story or simply a beloved poem, song, or reading. The ceremony will be led, on both September 2 and September 6, by Schuhchen, who describes for us the function of the Tea Ceremony in her native Taiwan (see below).

GUNG-FU TEA CEREMONY

Schuhchen Guo

Gung-fu tea literally means "making tea with good intentions and effort." It is a way of life in Taiwan where "Come in and drink tea!" is a common greeting. Tea is served during meetings, weddings, funerals, banquets, social events. It is also used as an offering for ancestor worship.

Tea is grown in every region and sold on every street corner in Taiwan. Teahouses are popular places to hang out. Although there are many ways to prepare tea—in cups, bowls, teakettles, tiny teapots—the traditional Gung-fu method of preparing tea is the most popular. It is ideally suited for oolong tea, the most famous of Taiwanese teas, which is produced through a unique process of withering under the strong sun and oxidation, and then curling and twisting. The most desirable teapots are Yi-xing teapots, which are made of fine clay and crafted in the Yi-xing province of China. The shape of the teapots and quality of the clay provide an even temperature for steeping the tea.

Gung-fu tea is served in teacups that usually hold about three sips of tea. In a Gung-fu ceremony the tea is poured evenly into teacups (covered by a tall sniffing cup that contains the tea aroma so guests can appreciate the scent) in a circular manner around the guests. Then either the host or the guests pour the tea from the sniffing cup to the drinking cups, widemouthed, white, short cups that cool the tea and show the color of the tea clearly so it too can be appreciated.

CHECK YOUR EMAIL TO CONFIRM SANGHA MEETING LOCATION

Due to the renovation happening at the Friends Meetinghouse, sangha meetings were sometimes held in members' homes or at the Madison Zen Center during the month of August. We have learned that the work will continue into September, so it remains necessary to consult email regarding the location of a Tuesday or Friday gathering. Schedulers will post information to the listserv as soon as it is available.

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.

UPCOMING MEETINGS

Schedulers Council: September 9

Caretaking Council: September 11

WANDERING AROUND AN ALBUQUERQUE AIRPORT TERMINAL

Naomi Shihab Nye

After learning my flight was detained four hours, I heard the announcement: If anyone in the vicinity of Gate 4A understands any Arabic, please come to the gate immediately. Well, one pauses these days. Gate 4A was my own gate. I went there. An older woman in full traditional Palestinian dress, just like my grandma wore, was crumpled to the floor, wailing loudly. Help, said the flight service person. Talk to her. What is her problem? I put my arm around her and spoke to her haltingly. Shu dow-a, shu-biduck habibti, stani stani schway, min fadlick, sho bit se-wee? The minute she heard any words she knew—however poorly used—she stopped crying. She thought our flight had been cancelled entirely. She needed to be in El Paso for some major medical treatment the following day. I said no, no, we're fine, you'll get there, just late, who is picking you up? Let's call him and tell him. We called her son and I spoke with him in English. I told him I would stay with his mother till we got on the plane and would ride next to her southwest. She talked to him. Then we called her other sons just for the fun of it. Then we called my dad and he and she spoke for a while in Arabic and found out of course they had ten shared friends. Then I thought just for the heck of it why not call some Palestinian poets I know and let them chat with her. This all took up about two hours. She was laughing a lot by then. Telling about her life. Answering questions. She had pulled a sack of homemade mamool cookies, little powdered sugar crumbly mounds stuffed with dates and nuts, out of her bag and was offering them to all the women at the gate. To my amazement, not a single woman declined one. It was like a sacrament. The traveler from Argentina, the traveler from California, the lovely woman from Laredo; we were all covered with the same powdered sugar. And smiling. There are no better cookies. And then the airline broke out the free beverages from huge coolers and the two little girls for our flight, one African-American, one Mexican-American, ran around serving us all apple juice and lemonade and they were covered with powdered sugar, too. And I noticed my new best friend—by now we were holding hands—had a potted plant poking out of her bag, some medicinal thing, with green furry leaves. Such an old country traveling tradition. Always carry a plant. Always stay rooted to somewhere. And I looked around that gate of late and weary ones and thought, this is the world I want to live in. The shared world. Not a single person in this gate, once the crying of confusion stopped, has seemed apprehensive about any other person. They took the cookies. I wanted to hug all those other women, too. This can still happen, anywhere. Not everything is lost.