

The Snowflower Sun

May and June 2013

Discourse on the Dharma Seal

by Jim Roseberry

The Buddha was addressing his bhikshus. “Do you know of the wonderful Dharma Seal? Listen with your pure mind while I tell you about it.” As my own mind drifted to barking creatures on the California coast with the faint hope of achieving pureness, a simple question arose. What is the essence of this discourse in which the Buddha identified three doors of liberation: emptiness, signlessness, and wishlessness. Why does it confer the status of a Dharma Seal? Is it similar to the Seal of Good House-keeping? It seemed opaque.

Let's start with emptiness. *All dharmas are empty*. So the five skandhas are empty. The package with which we come to the world -- body, feeling, perceptions, mental formations, and (the container of all these) consciousness, that vast “storehouse” holding the seeds created by the activity of the first four—all empty! What? The Giants didn't win the World Series. No, that's not it. Start where you are. Start with your senses, but try to go further. How do our senses deceive us? How does our mind construct notions that are incomplete and limiting? Do we get obsessed with surface notions and miss deeper realities? It is normal for us to translate what we see and feel and think into ideas and world views. However without the Dharma Seal to guide us, we may cling to surface notions that cut us off from the deeper realities and prevent us from nourishing our good seeds which are the foundation of a joyful existence.

Take this chair to my left, forlorn and without an occupant. It has a *form*: a simple object made of metal and cloth. It may incite a *feeling*: pleasant unpleasant, or neutral. If I sit in it I will be comfortable or uncomfortable. *Perceptions* may arise: the chair is utilitarian but not elegant. *Mental formations* yield a more elaborate narrative. Why did Friends buy it? Was it cheap? Finally, all this information comes via (the seeds in) one's *consciousness* which might well allow us to spin a further tale about the chair. No, our thoughts are not new.

Why are these notions empty? As we peel away the surface, we may recognize that a different realm exists. In its core molecular structure, the chair is in constant motion - imagine what it will look like in 500 years! That is why focusing on the surface appearance of the chair as if it were a permanent fixture, accurately described by one five-letter word, misses so much. This discourse asks us to look deeper and be liberated. Phew! So emptiness is liberating. Our notions are subjective. Our world is constantly changing; it is interdependent. Getting stuck in appearance is an invitation to suffering because it may lead us to make choices that run counter to the best and most compassionate understanding of our world.

“Signlessness” is the second door of liberation. Everything manifests by means of a sign, a marker of how it appears, and it's easy to get caught in the sign. Language is a useful tool for making sense of our world. However, words may become static representations of a dynamic and interrelated world. Start with words and go deeper. Stop. Look deeply into appearances. Am I sure?

“Wishlessness”, not grasping at or running after things, is the third door of liberation. Wishing for this or that prevents us from focusing on the joys of the present moment. What if we don't get what we want? What if we get what we want and then want something else? Stop. Look and listen deeply.

The truth of this discourse is to be found in one's experience. It is not true because the Buddha proclaimed it to be true. Nor is it true because many Buddhists believe it. The Seal's value is derived from one's experience – most likely slowly and in small doses – as we learn how to focus our attention on the emptiness, signlessness, and wishlessness of the deeply appreciated present moment.



May and June Calendar As spring plantings take hold, at both Tuesday and Friday sangha we root ourselves in the loveliness and protection of the Five Mindfulness Trainings. We sit at 7 p.m. Intro to Thay and Sangha, on the first Friday of May and the first Tuesday of June, is at 6:15.

May 2013

Tuesday Sangha Meetings	Friday Sangha Meetings
	May 3 Intro to SnowFlower & Thich Nhat Hanh -Bo Boustead The First Mindfulness Training - Carolyn Schueppel
May 7 Three Refuges – Don Katz	May 10 The Fourth Mindfulness Training - Diane Lauver
May 14 The Second Mindfulness Training - Mary Gallagher	May 17 The Second Mindfulness Training - Tom Loomis
May 21 The First Mindfulness Training - Larry Mandt	May 24 <i>Extended Sit – Susan O’Leary</i>
Saturday, May 25, 3:00-5:30 Half Day of Mindfulness followed by a potluck Hosted by Micha and Karuna, at “The Farm”, Directions bnamenwirth@yahoo.com Formal recitation of the Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings	
May 28 The Third Mindfulness Training - Bonnie Trudell	May 31 The Third Mindfulness Training - Jim Roseberry

Metta represents a tremendous blessing in the knowledge that there is a choice about what we choose to feed in ourselves, that there is the possibility of remembering what we most deeply treasure and value, and then to translate that sense of possibility into an embodied way of being moment to moment.

- **Dharma Teacher Cheri Maples**

June 2013

Tuesday Sangha Meetings	Friday Sangha Meetings
June 4 Intro to SnowFlower & Thich Nhat Hanh - Lisa Glueck Metta - Mary Michal	June 7 Metta - Mary Michal
June 11 The Fourth Mindfulness Training - Cheri Maples	June 14 The Three Refuges – Cheri Maples
June 18 The Fifth Mindfulness Training - David Haskin	June 21 The Fifth Mindfulness Training - David Haskin
Saturday, June 22, 3:00 to 5:00 p.m. Half-Day of Mindfulness followed by a potluck Hosted by David and Mary, Rural Barneveld – Info to follow Celebrate the Solstice	
June 25 Transmission	June 28 Transmission

SnowFlower 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.

Early Departures During recent months, more people seem to be leaving Sangha after the second sit and before the dharma talk. In our tradition, sitting and walking deepen our connection to the present moment; and the dharma talk and discussion provide the opportunity to learn, but also to practice deep listening and loving speech from that place of presence. The talk and discussion are as much a part of our practice as sitting and walking.

If you must leave early, please know that you go with the Sangha's best wishes. As a courtesy, please sit near the door to minimize the disruption of your departure. If you are able, please try to stay to the end.

- **Snow Flower Steering Council**

*The list of tasks like railroad tracks
stacked to the horizon
is but secondary.
There is nothing to do.*

*Thoughts arise
because there is nothing to think about,
and nature abhors...*

*Embrace the emptiness.
Here rest resides.
This day is going to last forever.*

by Elizabeth Galewski



Tonglen Loving Kindness Meditation

by Cheri Maples

Tonglen is a loving-kindness practice that has its roots in the Tibetan tradition. This practice is actually the reverse of the usual loving kindness procedure where we breathe in loving kindness and breathe out pain. Instead, on the in-breath, we breathe in our own as well as the pain of all others who suffer. On the out-breath, we send loving kindness to ourselves and all others. Instead of breathing in relief, we breathe in pain -- and breathe out love. The power of Tonglen lies in its capacity to dissolve the separation between me and you, us and them. It is a living reminder that I am not alone, that my pain is shared.

Tonglen is also the experience of awakening bodhichitta, the heart and mind of love. It is a way of personally experiencing how we may find compassion and empathy inside pain. We feel that we are not alone; we are in the same boat with many others. We all aspire to open, only to find ourselves closing down again. We all, regardless of external circumstances, have the capacity for joy and to let go of storylines built around the pain. Each of us has this soft spot – this capacity for love and tenderness.

I find that breathing in suffering not only helps me feel connected to a community much larger than myself, but the practice itself softens me. Transformation often occurs right in the painful place where life has brought me to my knees. My own pain and fear become the basis for opening my heart to the distress of others. Then my personal misery does not close me down, but becomes a stepping stone toward connection with others, and the understanding that my situation is not personal.

I have also found that I can own the negativity of my resentment and anger for a loved one or for an adversary, and still wish them to be free from harm, to be filled with great ease, and to know the joy of giving and receiving love.

Tonglen Guided Meditation (Breathe gently between each of the steps.)

- 1-With eyes softly closed, bring your attention to the area of your heart.
- 2-Feel the breath and the heart together, as one. Feel your breath as if it moved in and out of the heart.
- 3-Bring to mind a current life challenge (an illness, death of a loved one, end of a relationship, conflict with a loved one, friend, coworker).
- 4-Think of all the people, those you know and those you do not know, who are facing similar challenges. On the in-breath breathe in pain, theirs as well as your own; on the out-breath send relief. The relief may be in the form of a kinesthetic body experience or "respond wisely". Do this with as much sincerity of heart as possible.

