

# The SnowFlower Sun

July and August 2010

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## RIGHT CONCENTRATION

Mary Gallagher

I can easily think of concentration as fixation: racking my brain in a game and directing my energy like a saturated solution that needs diluting. In meditation, it may include gritting my teeth and the determination to keep the mind on the breath no matter what: I will not think about what I did or did not do yesterday; I will not think about what I will or will not do tomorrow. Then I came across this passage in a novel: "...Like berry picking: If you stand in the same place, you'll find good berries...But if you adjust your body even slightly, adjust your level by kneeling or squatting, move even one degree around the berry cane, then a different berry will be revealed, one that you never would have believed you could have missed, its color is so vivid, it is so perfectly ripe." A dharma door had just opened.

I read somewhere that we need to let the mind rest. We don't want to force it to examine the breath, but rather to let the mind rest on the breath—along with the crocus opening in the yard, with the waves that have replaced the ice on the lakes. Not concerned about the outcome, simply resting with what is before us. For me, this has become a helpful way to think about concentration in meditation.

Concentration is both an art and a process, the process of returning over and over. St. Francis understood well when he said, "What we need is a cup of understanding, a barrel of love, and an ocean of patience." Sometimes the task of coming back over and over and over may seem fruitless. But how many times have we gone away from the reality of our life? If we wish to awaken, we have to find our way back with our full being, our full attention. St. Francis tells us to bring ourselves back quite gently. And if we do nothing during the whole of the hour but bring our mind back a thousand times, though it went away again every time, the hour would be very well employed.

Now, every time I come back, I try to remember to focus on the entire berry bush, not just the berry before me. I can't tell you how many times, when I have wandered and come back to the breath, I have also discovered my shoulders hunched, my head turned, arms tight, heart beating fast. I need then to mindfully relax my body, open my throat, and then refocus on the breath. How can the mind rest on the breath if I am tense and fighting to "do it right?"

I have found that developing a deep quality of interest in my spiritual practice is one of the keys to the whole art of concentration. I am certain that steadiness is nourished by the degree of interest with which we focus our attention. Our interest must be in the practice itself, not in what we will gain

**Dear Sangha,  
The Annual Business Meeting of SnowFlower Sangha will be on Monday, July 26th from 6:30–9:00 p.m. at the Friends Meetinghouse. There is important business to share and discuss. This is a good opportunity to learn about and participate in the workings of our sangha as well as to provide your input. Please plan to attend.**

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from it. Letting go of outcomes appears to be an essential part of the process. Learning to concentrate is not a matter of thinking and analyzing. It requires a clearing or emptying of the mind and an opening of the heart so that we can listen and hear in a new, deeper way.

A silver bird  
 flies over the autumn lake.  
 When it has passed,  
 the lake’s surface does not try  
 to hold on to the image of the bird.

*Dhyana Master Huong Hai, 1627–1715*

**JULY CALENDAR**

Tuesday (7:00 – 8:30 PM)	Friday (7:00 – 9:00 PM)
	7/2 <b>6:30 p.m.: Intro to Thich Nhat Hanh and Sangha</b> Maureen Brady 7:00: Building Harmony in the Sangha Organism Cheri Maples
7/6 Distractions, Concentration, and Addiction Michael Helt	7/9 The Four Holy Truths From the Avatamsaka Sutra Larry Mandt
7/13 Common Ground Between Buddhism and Other Faiths Elliott Graham	7/16 Mindfulness in the Body Jane Peckham
Saturday, 7/17 Half Day of Mindfulness at Karuna and Micha Namenwirth’s (The Farm) Potluck to follow; call 832-6658 for directions	
7/20 Sutra on the Five Ways of Managing Anger Jim Roseberry	7/23 Zen Keys: A Guide to Zen Practice Jon Reed
Monday, 7/27 6:30 to 9:00 p.m. <b>Annual Sangha Business Meeting</b> Friends Meetinghouse	
7/27 The 14 Mindfulness Trainings Gloria Green	7/30 Gathas Don Katz

**INTRO TO MINDFULNESS AND SANGHA SESSIONS ON JULY 2 and AUGUST 3**

Half-hour sessions on mindfulness and sangha will occur at 6:30 p.m. on July 2 and August 3. While most useful for newcomers, all are invited and welcome to stay on for sangha at 7:00 p.m.

**A NOTE FROM THE JULY/AUGUST SCHEDULERS**

In July and August we will engage in a “summer selection” of topics, an eclectic mix to support and keep our practice 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 experiencing ancient practices of metta meditation, sutras and mindfulness trainings. Whatever our comings and goings this summer, evenings with SnowFlower offer a calm anchor of mindfulness.

**AUGUST CALENDAR**

Tuesday (7:00 – 8:30 PM)	Friday (7:00 – 9:00 PM)
8/3 <b>6:30 p.m.: Intro to Thich Nhat Hanh and Sangha</b> Elliott Graham 7:00: Invoking the Bodhisattvas’ Names Savitri Tsering	8/6 Sutra on Putting an End to Anger Jim Roseberry
8/10 Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing Gennifer Mott	8/13 The 14 Mindfulness Trainings Savitri Tsering
Saturday, 8/14, 3:00 to 5:30 p.m. Half-Day of Mindfulness at Karuna and Micha Namenwirth’s (The Farm) Potluck to follow; call 832-6658 for directions	
8/17 Metta Meditation Lisa Glueck	8/20 Learning to Accept Ourselves With Compassion David Haskin
8/24 All Buddhas Don Katz	8/27 Walking and Sitting Meditation: “Walking and Sitting the Talk” Thomas Loomis
8/31 Physical Challenges and the Dharma Diane Lauver	

**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 (west) side of building. Go up the stairs, following the arrows to the Wesley Room. Note: A greeter will be available until 7:15 p.m., after which time the doors will be locked per church policy.

We also meet Fridays (7–9 pm) in the Sanctuary of the Friends Meetinghouse, 1704 Roberts Court, near Camp Randall Stadium. Arrival time for Friday night sangha is from 6:45 to 7:00 p.m. We warmly welcome everyone. In order to create a peaceful atmosphere, please allow enough time for parking and settling into your place by 7:00 p.m. Thank you for your cooperation. Please leave shoes in the hall.

For both meetings, please try to arrive at 6:55 p.m. (earlier if you can help set up) so that we can begin our sits in quiet. **Please remember that sangha is a scent-free zone.**

### **SNOWFLOWER WEBSITE AND LISTSERV**

The SnowFlower Sangha website is [www.snowflower.org](http://www.snowflower.org). You can subscribe to the SnowFlower listserv on the web or by sending an email to [SnowFlower-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:SnowFlower-subscribe@yahoogroups.com).

### **MEETING NOTICE**

**Mary Michal**

Rabbi Renee Bauer, Executive Director of the Interfaith Coalition for Worker Justice (ICWJ), has invited SnowFlower and other sanghas in Madison to come together to discuss worker justice and the Second Mindfulness Training. The meeting will take place in August at the home of Don Katz and Rebecca Krantz. You, your family, and your friends are invited to this evening of sharing the dharma and learning ways that this Training can manifest in our community. Rabbi Bauer and the workers ICWJ represents have a compelling story and they have graciously offered to share it with us. If you know you will be attending, please let Don know. You are also welcome to come at the last minute. Contact Don or me for more information.

### **A NOTE FROM THE STEERING COUNCIL**

**Suzanne Kilkus**

It has come to our attention that some sangha members are looking for ways to donate to SnowFlower. The current mechanism to do that is either to donate in the baskets provided or to send a check made out to SnowFlower to Karen Plum, our treasurer.

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### **Loving Kindness Meditation: Metta**

**Suzanne Kilkus**

Metta meditation helps us create a new relationship with our inner “neighborhood.” The practice helps us attend to clearing the field of our mind of its usual patterns of negative self-preoccupation, harsh self-judgment, doubts, rejections, fears—all the ways that we are the villain in the drama we create for our lives.

Meditation form:

May I be safe and free from harm.

May I be happy and joyful.

May I be healthy in body and mind.

May I live with ease and in peace.

These simple phrases have a profound effect on our well-being and our actions in very gentle ways. It doesn't matter if we “feel” anything at the time we are saying them. We start with the attention on ourselves and then move through six other categories: benefactor; friend or loved one who is doing well; friend or loved one who is having difficulty; neutral person; someone with whom you have difficulty; all beings. Each of these categories expands our circle of loving kindness like a pebble dropped in water sends out ripples all around it.

As you begin, you might like to picture yourself sitting in a circle of many loving people, some of whom you know and others whom you don't. Sitting together in this circle supports your practice and cultivates your own good-heartedness and loving kindness.