

The SnowFlower Sun

September / October 2016

APRANIHITA – the Third Door of Liberation

from a talk by Amy Krohn

Thay gives us many touchstones to rely on in our practice. He can so beautifully pull profound concepts into simple explanations, and then encourage us to practice and work with them ourselves. The basic idea of Apranihita, a Sanskrit word commonly translated as aimlessness, is that we don't have to run after anything outside of ourselves. All we have to do is be ourselves, fully and authentically. At the back of Thay's early classic, *"The Miracle of Mindfulness"*, he gives a number of simple meditation exercises in which are embedded the concepts which form the foundation for our practice.

Take the example called "The Pebble". "While sitting still and breathing slowly, think of yourself as a pebble which is falling through a clear stream...Sink toward the spot of total rest on the gentle sand of the riverbed...where you remain at complete rest, watching your breath, free from thoughts or wishes. Speaking of apranihita, Thay asks, "Does the rose have to do something? No, the purpose of a rose is to be a rose. Your purpose is to be yourself. You are wonderful just as you are... Life is precious as it is. All the elements for your happiness are already here. Just being in the moment in this place is the deepest practice of meditation."

We usually try to hold on to life and run away from death. But, according to the teaching, everything has been nirvana from the non-beginning. So why grasp one thing and avoid another? We think there is something to attain, something outside of ourselves, but everything is already here. We already are it. Thay frequently uses a beautiful analogy about a wave to describe how we need suffering to find enlightenment, because enlightenment and suffering are the same. Enlightenment is when the wave realizes it is water. The wave does not need to attain the state of being water – the wave is water.

We live in the historical dimension, in the world of existence and non-existence, coming and going, and, at the same time, we are always in touch with nirvana, our true nature. Just as a wave has always been water, we have always been in nirvana. All we need to do is touch the water in ourselves. When I find myself struggling, I return to this touchstone, "just touch the water".

More from Thay on the subject of aimlessness. "These 24 hours are a precious gift, a gift we can only receive fully when we have opened the Third Door of Liberation, apranihita. If we think we have 24 hours to achieve a certain purpose, today will become a means to attain an end. The moment of chopping wood and carrying water IS the moment of happiness. To have happiness in the moment is the spirit of apranihita."

In closing, one last touchstone in the form of Thay's gatha:

Waking up this morning, I smile.

24 brand new hours are before me.

I vow to live fully in each moment

and to look at all beings with the eyes of love.



September/ October Calendar We look forward to being together as the season turns from the heat and intensity of high summer to the abundance and gratitude of autumn.

In September and October, the calendar topics from SnowFlower's four weekly gatherings promise to continue to inspire and to spark interest in lively dharma sharing. One Tuesday evening and one Friday evening session will enjoy visiting guest speakers from the Madison Insight Meditation group.

Wednesday afternoon sangha will continue to study and discuss one of the Buddha's earliest writings, the breath sutra, with commentary by Thay. Sunday morning sangha is enjoying reading from Thay's *The Art of Communication*.

September 2016

| Sundays | Tuesdays | Wednesdays | Fridays |
|--|--|-------------------------------------|---|
| | | | 9/2 The Second Mindfulness Training – Rosebud Sparer |
| 9/4 Host & Lead - Gerri Gurman | 9/6 6:15pm Intro to Sangha - Bonnie Trudell Right Livelihood - Rosebud Sparer | 9/7 Breathe! You Are Alive | 9/9 Why We Go on Retreat – Steven Spiro |
| 9/11 Host - Sam Sinai Lead – Curt Pawlisch | 9/13 Opening to Love - Don Katz | 9/14 Breathe! You Are Alive | 9/16 Thich Nhat Hanh and the International Sangha - Cheri Maples |
| 9/18 Host & Lead - Celeste Robins | 9/20 My Path to SnowFlower - Amy Krohn & Papa Fall | 9/21 Breathe! You Are Alive | 9/23 My Path to SnowFlower - Amy Krohn & Papa Fall |
| 9/25 Host & Lead – Tod Highsmith & Joan Braune | 9/27 Perspectives of a Lu-Bu – Chris Lee-Thompson | 9/28 The Five Mindfulness Trainings | 9/30 Mindfulness & Contentment – David Haskin |

SnowFlower Sangha Cancellation Policy

In case of inclement weather, an email will be sent to the listserv by 3:00 pm the day of sangha and a notice will be posted on the door of the Friends Meetinghouse.

Join the SnowFlower email list by emailing Ann Varda at annvarda@gmail.com.




Kalyana Mitta Groups Anyone who has been attending SnowFlower for six months or longer is eligible to participate in a Kalyana Mitta (spiritual friends) group. These groups generally meet monthly and provide an opportunity to deepen one's practice within a smaller group setting. For more information, please contact Susan Pearsall, dmls313@sbcglobal.net.

Residential Retreat with James Baraz, at Pine Lake Camp, Westlake, WI, from October 27-30, 2016. Register at <http://madisonmeditation.org/retreats/baraz.html>, sponsored by Madison Vipassana, Inc..

Start throwing blessings around and chances are you will start noticing all kinds of things you never noticed before.

B.B.Taylor, "An Altar in the World"

October 2016

| Sundays | Tuesdays | Wednesdays | Fridays |
|---|---|---------------------------------|---|
| 10/2 Host & Lead - Gerri Gurman | 10/4 The Five Mindfulness Trainings - Gloria Green | 10/5 Breathe! You Are Alive | 10/7 6:15 Intro to Sangha - Lisa Glueck Faith & Devotion in Buddhism - Don Katz |
| 10/9 Host & Lead - Don Katz | 10/11 The Second Arrow - Mary Michal | 10/12 Breathe! You Are Alive | 10/14 TBA |
| SnowFlower Annual Retreat October 14-16, Bethel Horizons, Dodgeville, WI Practicing Wholeheartedly: Experiencing the Miracle of Mindfulness. A weekend of Mindfulness with Dharma Teachers Jack Lawlor & Cheri Maples, vegetarian food preparation by Rajan. Contact Walt Keough: walt@snowflower.org | | | |
| 10/16 Host & Lead - Gerri Gurman | 10/18 Prison Dharma - Steven Spiro | 10/19 Breathe! You Are Alive | 10/21 The Compassion that Transforms - David Haskin |
| 10/23 Hosts & Leads Molly Krochalk & Morris Young | 10/25 Thich Nhat Hanh and the International Sangha - Cheri Maples | 10/26 The Eight Realizations | 10/28 Gratitude - Jan Sheppard |
| 10/30 Host & Lead - Pam Moran & Dave Zeman | | |  |

Tuesday and Friday Sangha Meetings are held at The Friends Meetinghouse, 1704 Roberts Court, Madison, WI. 7 – 8:30pm.

Wednesday Daytime Sangha Meetings are from 1:30-3 pm every Wednesday at 1834 S. Sharpe's Corner Road, Mt. Horeb. Information regarding location and topic will be sent to the listserv every Sunday. For info, contact Mary Gallagher (608) 274-2769 or Susan Pearsall (608) 238- 5929. Wednesday Sangha includes sitting and walking meditation followed by dharma sharing and discussion.

Sunday Morning Sangha Meetings are held at the homes of SnowFlower members from 10 – 11:30 am. Information regarding location and topic will be sent to the listserv every Wednesday. Join by emailing listserv@snowflower.org. Or, call: Tom Loomis (608) 334-4532, Finn Enke (608) 243-7971. Sunday Sangha includes sitting & walking meditation followed by dharma sharing and discussion.

What is the practice of pausing and refraining? For me, it means taking a few breaths, usually three, before reacting out of anger or fear or the need to control. This is to practice mindfulness off the cushion.

Sometimes, after the three breaths, I still have to be patient and not do anything for a while. Just let the matter rest until I know what is true for my own heart. Curiosity plays a part in this and also de-personalizing. I find it helpful to remember the eight worldly dharmas or concerns: pleasure and pain; praise and blame; gain and loss; fame and disrepute.

Thay instructs us to ask ourselves “Are you sure?” This is such a good practice for those of us who have the habit of jumping quickly into situations, as soon as our habit energy tells us to do something, say something, fix something. I am reminded of this when my friends or daughters tell me about some current challenge in their lives, and I forget to listen and go right into telling them what to do. This is now better with practice but occasionally someone will gently remind me, ‘I didn’t ask you to fix it – I just need you to listen’.

Habit energies of thinking, speaking, and acting can be very strong for me, fueled by anxiety, fear, anger and the illusion that we are somehow responsible for controlling or fixing whatever it is. The stories may be different for each of us, but the suffering that results comes from the same place. What I am learning by the short pause is that I rarely regret NOT saying or NOT doing, and that I am much more likely to regret words that I have spoken or emails sent reactively. The three breath pause, even when it is not enough, can help me be curious and non-defensive instead of anxious or angry.

Thay writes that the practice of shamatha, stopping, is absolutely fundamental to our practice. Without it there cannot be insight. He tells the Zen story of the man galloping along full speed on a horse. When a passerby calls out to the man, “Where are you going?” the man says, “I don’t know – ask the horse”.

Thanks to this practice I try to stop periodically, even when I am not triggered. The ringing of the telephone is a good bell of mindfulness. If I am on my bike and I hear the bells in a small town church tower, I stop and breathe and know I am I in the present moment. After that, I don’t have to yell at the owner of a dog, or seethe about it. I know that all is clearer if I just give myself the amazing gift of stopping.

You do not need to leave your room.
Remain sitting at your table and listen.
Do not even listen, simply wait.
Do not even wait, be still and solitary.
The world will freely offer itself to you
to be unmasked, it has no choice.
It will roll in ecstasy at your feet.

Franz Kafka

