

The SnowFlower Sun

January / February 2017

Second Arrow and The Practice of the Brahmaviharas

from a talk by Mary Michal

The Second Arrow teaching -- with our post-election country and world in mind -- comes from a wonderful sutra (The Arrow: Sallatha Sutta). This sutra is about being with pain without running away from or becoming attached to it, that is, without resistance or obsession. An excerpt, paraphrased, follows. 'When an uninstructed person is touched by a painful feeling, resistance or obsession with that feeling may take over. The result is that the person then feels TWO pains. A well-instructed person, however, can discern the origination and passing away of the pain of the first arrow and does not feel the second arrow pain of resistance and clinging'.

I think we may all be experiencing, post-election, the second arrow. For me, it appears when I want so badly for our country to move in the direction of inclusivity and I see things that feel inconsistent with my values. I fear that all the important efforts that have been started will be undone and reversed. This pains me greatly. Other examples of second arrow pain usually have to do with self-judgment -- that I have not done enough to protect loved ones or the values I care about.

But the second arrow is tricky. When is it simply "human nature", that first unavoidable arrow; and when do "stories" kick in so that we find ourselves in second arrow territory? We do well to check out Thay's 5 and 14 Mindfulness Trainings. "Seeing that harmful actions arise from anger, fear, greed, and intolerance, which in turn come from dualistic and discriminative thinking, I will cultivate openness, non-discrimination, and non-attachment to views in order to transform violence, fanaticism, and dogmatism in myself and in the world."

This is also where the Four Brahmaviharas come in. If we practice loving kindness, sympathetic joy and compassion, out of that practice grows our ability to let go, to experience equanimity: "This is how it is right now." And, as our ability to let go increases, so does our freedom: freedom from fear. As part of my working on the second arrow regarding the zika virus, I began to feel connection and compassion with every woman, every grandmother whose daughter had been exposed. I could truly feel the connection with these countless women and be with them in their suffering. Somehow that helped me to feel less lonely, less separate. We ARE all in this together. Same with those who have leukemia, who experience a drastic change in what life now presents. Same with the elections! If I can truly come from a compassionate place, I will know where and how to place my energies for the well-being of all. We are not separate from Syrian refugees, Latino immigrants, minorities in Myanmar...

By letting go of the notion that it is possible to avoid the basic truth of dukkha, I can allow the pain of the first arrow to manifest, to reveal itself to me, and then to transform and maybe even to disappear. This, in turn, helps me to identify the second arrow before it gets imbedded. Just observing it all, without judgment, attachment or aversion, we open to the spaciousness in which freedom from fear can arise. Facing that first arrow of our unavoidable suffering is a key to true equanimity, freedom from fear. And if I can come from a place of metta and of compassion, I can feel engaged in co-creating a better world.



Mindfulness sees the whole parade of feelings without getting lost in them and without judging ourselves for feeling them.

January 2017

As we move into the deepest winter, we can look forward to a warm and sustaining array of topics and dharma discussions to carry us forward to next Spring.

Sundays	Tuesdays	Wednesdays	Fridays
1/1 The Art of Communicating – Host & Lead Celeste Robins	1/3 Intro to Sangha – Lisa Glueck Sights and Sounds of Plum Village – Catherine Hammi	1/4 Breathe! You Are Alive	1/6 Ancestor's Prayer – Susan O'Leary
1/8 The Art of Communicating – Host & Lead Gerri Gurman	1/10 A Zen Perspective on "No Birth...No Death" – Steven Spiro	1/11 Breathe! You Are Alive	1/13 How Do Politics and Dharma Inform Each Other? – Steven Spiro
1/15 The Art of Communicating – Host & Lead Tod Highsmith	1/17 Mindfulness of Thoughts – Don Katz	1/18 Breathe! You Are Alive	1/20 Boundlessness and the Earthly Mundane World – Rosebud Sparer
1/22 The Art of Communicating – Host & Lead Pam Moran	1/24 Hope in the Dark – Susan O'Leary	1/25 Breathe! You Are Alive	1/27 Mindfulness of Feelings – Don Katz
1/29 The Art of Communicating – Host & Lead Celeste Robins	1/31 Focus on the Basics of Sitting Practice – Rosebud Sparer		

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.

“Refuge and Transformation: Practicing Meditation-Based Mindful Spirituality” A Day of Mindfulness sponsored by Lakeside Sangha. Sunday, January 29, 2017 - 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Evanston Ecology Center, 2024 McCormick Blvd. For more information: lisejacobson@comcast.net



Again this year, the Winter Potluck—Saturday, January 21 at 6:00 p.m.-- will be hosted by Susan O’Leary and Jim Roseberry, 2220 West Lawn Ave. Please bring a vegetarian dish to pass, but no soup or anything that requires a bowl. orfam1@gmail.com for directions.

February 2017

Sundays	Tuesdays	Wednesdays	Fridays
		2/1 The Five Mindfulness Trainings	2/3 Intro to Sangha – Lisa Glueck What Exactly Does Dharma Mean? –Amy Krohn
2/5 The Art of Communicating – Host & Lead Gerri Gurman	2/7 My Path to SnowFlower – Sherrie & Doug Lien	2/8 The Four Noble Truths	2/10 Studying My Mind In Light Of Meditative Practice – Jim Roseberry
2/12 The Art of Communicating – Host & Lead Molly Krochalk	2/14 Recitation of the 5 Mindfulness Trainings – Gloria Green	2/15 The Noble Eightfold Path	2/17 Recitation of the 14 Mindfulness Trainings – Steven Spiro
2/19 The Art of Communicating – Host & Lead Pam Moran	2/21 Cultivating Joy in the Heart of Winter – Mary Michal	2/22 The Three Dharma Seals	2/24 Living with Uncertainty – David Haskin
2/26 The Art of Communicating – Host & Lead Tod Highsmith	2/28 What Exactly Does Dharma Mean? – Amy Krohn		

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 2117 Chadbourne Avenue, Madison. Information regarding location and topic will be sent to the listserve 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 listserve 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.



"When it comes, don't try to avoid it; when it goes, don't run after it. There is only this, there is nothing else." last words of the Chinese Zen master Ta-mei

CONTENTMENT

Excerpted from a (wonderful) talk by David Haskin

Contentment is "I AM enough." It is also "This MOMENT is enough." It is the deep understanding that everything is okay. Not thinking everything will be okay, but things are okay, just as they are. Just life living itself - even with challenges and difficulties that may not be surmountable.

Contentment is understanding in our bones that, despite all our striving, despite everything, we already have within us EVERYTHING – all the causes and conditions – that we need to be happy. With our practice we can come not only to feel that every moment is alive and good, but that it is also precious. This is certainly a central teaching in prison: how to be in a harsh environment and still feel content. And it is the same for those who are just living life, with no major problems.

Despite this truth, hard-wired in all of us are impediments to our ability to feel deeply, truly content. It's what we confront first-hand – or at least see clearly – every time we meditate. "Monkey mind" is not a failing on our part, it is an aspect that is hard-wired into each of us as members of the species homo sapiens, and it's an aspect that works against feeling contentment in this moment. We can say that, in the absence of mindfulness, we can't possibly be content as long as this automatic, hard-wired striving, craving, and aversion is going on.

The Buddha saw the nature of our minds clearly, and gave us the tools we need to get beyond this conditioning and to move toward a deep contentment. EVERY TIME WE TAKE A BREATH IN AWARENESS, WE ARE, AT LEAST FOR THAT MOMENT, SHORT-CIRCUITING THE INNATE STORYTELLING THAT GOES ON IN OUR MINDS....THE STORYTELLING THAT TAKES US AWAY FROM CONTENTMENT AND TOWARD STRIVING, TOWARD ALWAYS LOOKING FOR MORE, TOWARD LEANING INTO THE NEXT MOMENT INSTEAD OF BEING FULLY IN THIS ONE. Thay teaches this very succinctly when, in the Second of the Five Mindfulness Trainings, "True Happiness", he tells us: "I can live happily in the present moment simply by remembering that I already have more than enough conditions to be happy."

Now often things must change. Contentment isn't about being passive or letting things go when there is something that must be done: supporting our families, trying to correct injustice, becoming healthy when we are sick. No, taking wise action is certainly not the opposite of contentment. Striving, greed, aversion are.

Those of us who deal with serious illness can learn very quickly that each moment is precious; each moment of contentment is a whole life in and of itself. We learn that there's a certain timelessness to feeling content in this moment, that fundamental understanding that "this is enough." When we feel it deeply, this is highly transformative. It's what Thay is talking about when he uses the phrase, 'the miracle of mindfulness.' Indeed the miracle of being fully in this moment is contentment.

Bodhicitta is the wish for our lives to benefit all.

