



Newsletter

April 2002

Working with Moods of the Mind

by Ajahn Viradhammo, Ottawa, August 11, 2001

I have been visiting and teaching in Eastern Europe for the past month – in Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. My ability to speak Latvian is limited so when I spoke on Buddhism I needed the help of an interpreter. It was only a few weeks but in that short time I became accustomed to speaking in sound bites of a few minutes with pauses for the interpreter. This is the first time I've addressed an English speaking audience since then. It feels slightly odd to be giving a Dhamma talk in one continuous flow without those pauses. I'm often surprised to notice how easily my mind can become accustomed to a certain way of behaviour and feel slightly awkward when patterns change.

This is a trivial example of how habits of body or mind become easily ingrained in our psyches. We don't even notice it happening. What we do notice is our uneasiness when our habits are disrupted, when we are forced out of our comfort zones. If it's really serious we can become irritable, frightened or confused. Things change but we often don't flow with the changes. Our Buddhist teachings on impermanence and uncertainty are reminders to not expect stability in that which changes and is uncertain. The suggestion is simple enough but remembering this truth and applying it to life's challenges and changes seem to be something that needs constant reminding and remembering.

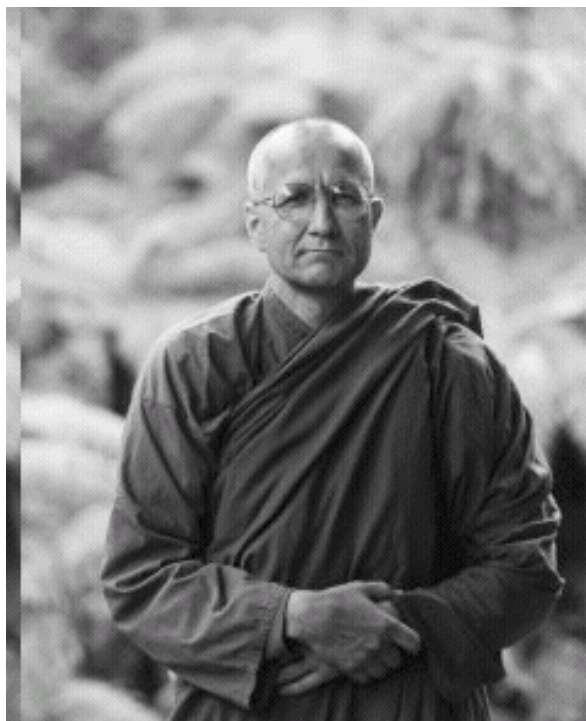
In 1977 I left Thailand with Ajahn Anando to visit our respective parents in North America. Our intention was to return via England where we were to meet with Ajahn Cha and Ajahn Sumedho and, from there, return to Thailand. Instead, my teacher

decided it would be good to stay in London and try to set up a forest monastery in the UK. I had been in Thailand for four and a half years and before that in India for a year and a half. I had grown to love Asia and feel familiar in Eastern environments. Living as a Buddhist monk in Thailand is marvellous because it's a Buddhist country and everyone understands the life of a monk. The monk's relation to the society is clear and the life of renunciation is well supported. I really wanted to return to Thailand and the thought of living in an enormous metropolis such as London was terribly intimidating. But my teacher asked me to stay. I had deep trust in his wisdom so I bit the bullet and stayed.

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Thus I was thrown out of my own comfort zone of a Thai forest monastery. As Ajahn Jagaro so aptly put it, I often felt like a fish in a tree when walking through the streets of London. At times I would feel homesick for Thailand. London was grey and rainy just like a bad Sherlock Holmes movie. I certainly wasn't having fun. These difficult feelings that were assailing my heart and mind became my objects of contemplation. I understood very clearly what we mean by alienation. I felt like an alien but not a jolly one like ET. The external situation had changed but why couldn't I just go with the flow? "Why do I get depressed? What is depression? Why do I feel self-conscious on the streets of London? What is this self-consciousness?" And so on. I would ask myself these questions and try to find a way out of inner conflict to a place of peaceful co-existence and acceptance.



Contemplation of the way things are is the heart of what we mean by the word 'practice' in Buddhism. It's not just sitting on a meditation cushion or going to a gathering of like-minded people. It is something we do all the time – reflecting and noticing how things change and how we respond or react to these changes. If there is conflict with the movement of life we try to understand conflict both in terms of our social responsibilities and our inner confusions. Thus going from Thailand to England became a very good opportunity for practice. My years in London were painful but necessary lessons in finding a refuge in the heart which was not dependent on the sunny atmosphere of a Buddhist country and the inspiration of Ajahn

Cha. The practice of contemplation is an inner education that we must go through in our journey from conflict to inner harmony.

During this most recent visit to Latvia I had the good fortune to meet my second cousin who I didn't even know existed. My parents fled Latvia in 1944 but her parents stayed behind and they had to endure all the hardships and cruelties of the Soviet times. My cousin is now 63 years of age and full of vitality. At an early point in her working career she was 'repressed' by the communist authorities. This meant she was subjected to a considerable amount of psychological abuse at work and in her living environment. Having to live under this intense pressure she knew she had to do something to lift her mind or she would end up turning to alcohol to drown her anger and pain. Of all things she chose jogging. She had been a runner in high school and so she took up running once again. This gave her the ability to relieve the inner pressures that built up every day. These pressures arose from external forces over which she had no control. She used her intelligence and will to stay strong in a terribly difficult time. This is good practice - contemplating the way things are and then making appropriate effort having understood what needs to be done.

And so it is in our own lives when things are out of control and we must respond to the unexpected and the unwanted. We are torn from the ease and comfort of having things the way we want them. To respond appropriately we need to make a decision and then use will or effort to

follow that decision. Sometimes we need to be passive and receptive. This involves a decision and takes effort. At other times we need to be assertive and forceful. This also involves a decision and requires effort. There is no single way to act. As much as we rehearse the future, inevitably we are called to respond to the unexpected. This holds true for the inner world of thoughts and emotions as well as the outer world of social interactions and responsibilities. As Ajahn Cha would so often repeat, "It's uncertain." If our responses are based on wisdom we will get a good result but if our efforts are driven by ill-considered knee-jerk reactions, then we will find ourselves becoming more immersed in confusion both socially and inwardly.

How can we ensure that our efforts are in line with peace and well-being? How do we make right effort? First of all, we need to be awake to our inner world and the underlying motivations for our thoughts, words and deeds. We can train this faculty of knowing things as they really are during a day of mindfulness such as today. For instance we can start by listening to sound. We make a decision to simply listen. This takes effort or will but it is not an effort to get anything, get rid of something or become someone. It is simply the effort to awaken or know how things are before we act or make any comment on them. We are paying attention from a base of clarity rather than from greed, hatred or delusion. We make a clear choice, a choice that is not motivated by desire or fear. In this way we can establish pure awareness that isn't biased by any deluded agendas. If we fail to understand what is meant by awareness

then we tend to react to life's changes from the force of ill-considered habit. This won't give a good result. Wisdom is lacking. An exercise of simple listening is thus a way of noticing how it feels to be aware and receptive to this moment. It is a training in awareness. And this training reinforces our ability to be aware and deepens our understanding of awareness.

If we learn to do this a lot then what opens up in consciousness is a kind of objectivity and spaciousness. We can begin to know the movement of consciousness more objectively rather than being caught by it. In the Thai tradition, they say madness is damaged awareness. If someone is having a psychotic episode, they would say 'sia sati', which means damaged awareness. A person caught up in some very difficult psychosis has no awareness. They have no space, no objectivity. They're completely caught in some awful drama and they totally believe in it. That's the nature of mental illness, isn't it? So, we're all a bit ill. We all get caught. We lose the spaciousness. We lose the

objectivity around certain inner mind states. Our practice is to continually return to that objectivity, to awareness. If we have that and we're really awake, then we can make efforts and try things out. Not from harsh judgments, or aversion, or repression, or denial or attachment to idealism. Not from those motivations but from simple and open awareness.

We can then try something. We can make a lot of

April Ice

Spring hasn't come yet to the river.
There is ice at the shore in torn pieces.
It moves with the current and
Makes the smallest, silvery sound,
Like tiny bells.

A strong wind is blowing intermittently:
The day is ending.

In a nearby park stands an empty fountain,
Surrounded by ice and snow,
Waiting for warmer days.

Everything is still except for the ice,
The wind and the river water.
Even the gulls sit quietly on the shore.

Everything is perfect just as it is.
The heart knows that.

Received from Phylis Jurgens, Seattle, Washington

effort or we can be more passive and patient with something. From the effort we make we can notice if it gives a good result. But if we're coming at it from an idea: "I should get rid of this", then there's already conflict and there's no real understanding. For instance, if I have a lot of aversion and attach to an ideal that I should not be averse this might make me feel guilty. But awakening to the feeling of aversion and wanting to go beyond it because I don't want to live a life of aversion is different. Taking the time to go into the problem and understanding its whole structure requires a different kind of effort. Awaken to and then contemplate this mood by investigating it in the body, observing the thoughts, learning to let go of the thoughts, and so on. All that is an inner education which takes place through awareness. Good results come forth from this kind of contemplative activity.

The meditative life is a creative experimentation with our own habits and inner conditioning - learning through a process of trial and error. It is a study and practice based on the one hand on our own conditioning and on the other the teachings that inspire us. The foundation for this kind of work is awareness. Thus, on this monthly day of mindfulness we come together and cultivate awareness of simple things like the breath, the posture or the various mind states that arise during our day together. Quite simply, we practice remembering the present moment or perhaps remembering to be present in the moment. This may seem mundane or even trivial but it becomes quite evident to most people how difficult it is to not dwell in the past or on the future. You have to be quite diligent. There's effort in that.

For most of us awareness of thought is quite a challenge. Being awake to the whole process of thinking we can learn some essential things about our inner habits. Notice that certain moods condition certain kinds of thoughts and a certain sense of self. If I feel annoyed I notice that the thoughts are annoyed and more importantly a

certain sense of self arises through those thoughts - a psychological self that has an annoyed nature. These thoughts create a me and an other. A world is created in relation to that mood, a world of annoyed relationships. This all happens very quickly. But if the mood is different, say excited, then the thoughts are excited, the sense of a psychological self is upbeat, and the world seems exciting. The mood changes, the thoughts change, the self changes, the world changes. None of it is ultimately real and yet it feels very real.

Having noticed this movement, having been awake to all of this I can make some choices. I can make effort but effort based on having seen how this process works. I can make choices to not think in a certain way. For instance if I notice a sense of self manifesting in thought that is negative and alienating I can choose not to think that way. This takes training but if I don't make that choice then I am condemned to repeat the cycles of annoyance, depression, fear, or whatever mood or train of thought snares me. The cycles of delusion can be frustratingly persistent. Even though we want to go beyond them they have become unskilful habits. It's rather perverse but we can be habituated to bad mental habits as we can be to bad physical postures. The choice to think differently might have to be made many times with the same mood, again and again until the habit is less insidious. This takes patience, faith, wisdom and determination. If possible a spot of humour is very helpful.

May I suggest we use this day of mindfulness to practice being present in the moment? Learn to be with what you're feeling, and with your body. If you're feeling strong emotions, fine, feel them. But try to feel them as a present moment physical experience rather than a whole story line of the past coming to the present moment. Really try to move away from the self-thoughts, the I-thoughts, the personality-view, the psychological-self. Move away from all the little

stories that go on all the time. Try to come back to simple things like the feeling of your breath, the feelings in your heart, the feeling of your feet walking - little things. That's how we train - learning to be aware of the ordinary in the present moment. It's quite lovely and simple. You're not trying to become Tiger Woods or anything. It's not that spectacular but is quite effective.

Having established this foundation of objective awareness we are more able to go beyond the various forms of unskilful conditioning that cause us conflict. For instance, I might suffer from a habit of inner-complaining and fault-finding with everything. At some point in my life I might notice that my thoughts are often dwelling on negative feelings and perceptions. Rather than being the complainer I start to notice the mind complaining. This is the first step, the first awakening. I notice myself complaining about society, about my government, about my body, about my family, about my job and on and on. Realizing how unhappy this makes me I decide to make some effort to change. Having made this decision, however, I'm disappointed to find myself complaining once again. I realize that breaking this habit is not going to be as easy as I thought. Then I try to overpower my thoughts and end up being harsh with myself when I don't succeed. An inner struggle ensues, the combatants being the bad me and the good me. This kind of inner warfare doesn't work because it's based on violence rather than wisdom. And yet I need to make effort.

Simply wanting to change is not sufficient. It's a start but to get good results we need wisdom. How does a habit arise? What keeps it going? What feeds it? For instance, what keeps that complaining mind bubbling away? Take the situation here in this temple. We have been sitting in this meditation hall all afternoon and our neighbours have been playing Country and Western music. It's a hot summer day and the windows are open. The volume control on the

neighbour's sound system is set to "loud." This has been a given part of the day. Perhaps these sounds, these sense impressions are a trigger for the habit of complaining. "Why don't they turn it down? I should have stayed home? Why are they so inconsiderate?" And so on: the mind on automatic pilot thinking complaint after complaint.

If I'm training in inner-listening I know what's happening and don't just blindly believe in my own projections. I accept and awaken to what's going on. But rather than be harsh on myself I make a choice to not go there, to not go to that realm of complaining. Rather than thinking in the old way I choose an alternative. Perhaps I choose to notice my body. I investigate the effect of complaining on my body, the tension it creates in my shoulders or the effect on my breath. The habit of complaining has now become an object of contemplation. I am no longer the complaining subject. I might experiment by thinking other thoughts. I might welcome the music rather than be averse to it. I might find I can just say to myself, "Don't make it a problem." and simply ignore it. In this way through trial and error and persistence I understand this habit, see its arising, know its danger and realize how to let it go, how to not get caught. I would also see that training the heart and mind is not an overnight miracle but takes considerable dedication.

The movement away from unskilful habits requires training. If I've been caught in the habit of negativity for 20 or 40 years and I then begin to notice and work on it, it's going to take awhile. The force of habit, what we call kamma, is still going to come surging up into consciousness. Even though I have the yearning to be free from a negative habit, it's still going to come up because that's the way of conditioning. If I understand the movement of thought and the addiction to negativity then I can say: "No. I'll return to awareness of the breath." I might have to do that 100 times in ten minutes. Who knows?

It depends on the strength of the habit. But if I keep doing that skilfully, with acceptance and patience, then the habit will begin to die. I won't be reinforcing bad habits but I'll also not be caught in the violence of repression. I'm not denying the existence of the habit. I'm not being violent with myself. It's a skilful training with effort that is based on acceptance, understanding and compassion.

We need to be aware and awake to do this, listening to the inner dialogue. We need to know how the moods of the mind condition certain kinds of thoughts. To see how certain kinds of thoughts and moods are very unskilful and the pursuit of them leads to unskilful results. We need to develop means and methods to shift attention to that which is skilful. Awareness of the body is very useful. Recollecting wholesome perceptions such as kindness and gratitude is also part of our training. But it won't work if the underlying principles aren't understood and is merely done as a Buddhist duty; e.g. "I should be this way. I should not be that way." That's not wisdom. Insight is the understanding of how these things work within you. It takes a lot of patience. You have to be very determined to transform consciousness. It doesn't happen by itself.

This morning I began by speaking on the use of will. Sometimes in a social situation you have to be assertive and sometimes you have to be receptive or passive. It's the same with your own mind. Sometimes you don't understand what's going on. You're confused. You just have to watch it for a while. You observe, start to see patterns, and then you learn how to shift attention away from the unskilful. Or sometimes you need to go into something. If you have, say, some unresolved grief and it comes surging up in a retreat, then you don't have to move away from it. Allow the grief to go through you. Make grief your object of contemplation. These are very individual patterns and we work through them in different ways. Understanding thought and seeing how the sense of I is created through thought – this is very important. Once we see that this sense of a self is just a thought formation conditioned by moods, conditioned by habits, the result of history, it's a great relief. When we begin to think rightly, "This is not me. This is not a permanent me. It's just the conditioned nature of habit. It will change." then we are on the path of liberation from these inner conflicts and afflictions.

New Executive for the Ottawa Buddhist Society

President:	Hoa Nguyen	(nhuhoang@mondenet.com) 770-7888
Secretary:	Oli Cosgrove	(obs_secretary@yahoo.ca) 741-7441
Treasurer:	Shanti Mendis	(smendis@magma.ca) 736-9015
Director Children & Youth Programs:	Priyani Mendis	(smendis@magma.ca) 736-9015
Librarian:	Mark Cuddy	(cuddyclan@sympatico.ca) 228-1604
Past President:	Nissanka Pussegoda	(npusse@magma.ca) 831-1972

Dexter Sampson's Memorial Service

Speech delivered at Tu An Pagoda, March 2, 2002

I feel extremely privileged to have known and worked with Dexter for a long time. As you know, it not always easy to work on committees with various personalities. Fortunately, Dexter's personality made a world of difference to many of us. He was always kind and compassionate to people regardless of how they treated him. He practiced patience and equanimity. He was also a very good team player. He was a good listener, easy to talk to, and showed great flexibility. He was a good role model and a source of inspiration to many of us.

Now I would like to highlight his major contributions to the OBS. Among them, he was

instrumental in preparing the new constitution and registering it as a corporation with the Ontario Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations. This is how OBS became a legal entity in June 1995. Dexter spent countless hours writing the by-laws of the Society and attending to all the correspondence.

Dexter also held office as Secretary for many years. Although he was offered the presidency, he preferred to maintain a relatively low profile. At the time of his death, he was a Director of the OBS. In addition to holding office, he also volunteered to do other more mundane tasks with much grace and dignity. He was always available to us as a trusted and valuable advisor during both good and bad times.

His demise is a great loss to the OBS and to many of us at a personal level.

Vesak Retreat with Bhante Gunaratana **Location, Dates, Priority and Cancellation Policy**

A meditation retreat with Bhante Gunaratana will be held Friday, May 17 to May 19, 2002, at Galilee Centre in Arnprior. The cost of the retreat is \$100. Until April 23, registration priority will be given to OBS members on a first-come, first-serve basis. Members who register and cancel will receive full refund up to May 3. There will be no refund for later cancellations unless the vacant spot is filled by a person from the wait list, and OBS will retain \$25 of the fee.

After April 23, registration will be open to all, and reservations given in the order in which registrations are received. The cancellation policy will be as outlined above. Please add \$25 for registrations submitted after May 3.

FURTHER INFO: To register, contact Oli Cosgrove at (613) 741-7441 (obs_secretary@yahoo.ca) or Nissanka at (613) 831-1972 (npusse@magma.ca). Retreat Guidelines and Registration forms may be found on the OBS website: <http://www.geocities.com/obswebs/>

About Bhante Gunaratana

Bhante Gunaratana is a bhikkhu of the Theravada tradition. He received full ordination at the age of 20 in Kandy, Sri Lanka. He worked for many years as a missionary in India and Malaysia. He has a Ph.D. in Philosophy from the American University and is the popular author of several articles and books including *Mindfulness in Plain English* (1994) and *Eight Mindful Steps to Happiness* (2001).

Bhante Gunaratana is now abbot of the monastery Bhavana Centre in West Virginia. He teaches meditation and conducts retreats world-wide. Please visit the Bhavana Centre web site at: <http://www.bhavanasociety.org>

Wheel of Life Cookbook

Our "Wheel of Life" cookbook, based on recipes served during our Days of Mindfulness, is off the press!

With 150 recipes for appetizers, soup, high protein meatless dishes, desserts and especially for hot and cold entrees and grains and pastas, it's a delicious and healthy way to promote two of our Society's main objectives; namely, to raise funds for our charities, and to raise awareness of the Ottawa Buddhist Society in greater Ottawa.

Of a modest 300 cookbooks printed, a third were sold in six weeks by only 23 of our members. We have 70 members, and if those who have not yet undertaken to help with sales will do so, we can expand our bank account by approximately \$1,800, a sum it takes many years to raise with membership fees.

The books – with red and white cover, coil binding for easy reading and dhamma verses to soothe the harried cook – are an easy sale. Two members who showed them to colleagues at work each sold more than 10. At only \$12, they also appeal to neighbours and friends, and make excellent, economical gifts.

Order your books by calling Oli Cosgrove at 741-7441. Home delivery (for a minimum order of 3 books) is available.

Monthly Days of Mindfulness

Once a month, members and friends of the Ottawa Buddhist Society gather to practice

mindfulness meditation at the Tu-An Pagoda (Vietnamese Buddhist Temple), 3591 Albion Road, near Bank Street. We make an attempt to schedule this observance day on the Saturday on or before a full moon, to commemorate the fact that the Buddha was enlightened under a full moon.

The Days of Mindfulness run from 8:00 am to 3:30 pm and include periods of sitting meditation, walking meditation, Dhamma readings, listening to Dhamma talks (from either an invited teacher or else a taped talk), occasional discussions, as well as a pot-luck vegetarian lunch. The youth group meets from 1:30pm - 3:30pm.

Verse 71 of the *Itivuttaka*

With mind rightly directed,
speaking right speech,
doing right deeds with the body:
a person here
of much learning,
a doer of merit
here in this life so short,
at the break-up of the body,
discerning,
reappears in heaven.

The Buddha

The days of mindfulness for 2002 are scheduled as follows (to be confirmed):

April 27th - with Professor Mathieu Boisvert - the Day of Mindfulness will be held in the worship hall at the Tu-An as normal. Due to renovations, the kitchen will not be available. Members are asked to make their own arrangements over the lunch hour. There will be a youth session between 1-2 p.m.

May - no Day of Mindfulness due to Bhante Gunaratana's visit. A public talk, however, has been confirmed at the Pagoda on May 15 at the Pagoda.

June - Punnadhammo Bhikkhu has tentatively accepted to lead our June 22 Day of Mindfulness and possibly also give an evening talk.

Membership Dues

The Ottawa Buddhist Society is dedicated to the propagation of the Buddha's teachings through a variety of means that include: organizing meditation retreats and monthly days of mindfulness, inviting guest teachers, and offering quarterly newsletters, dhamma books and taped talks. The Society is a registered non-profit organization and is dependent on membership dues and charitable donations to fund its activities. All organizational work is done on a voluntary basis.

The Executive appreciates all those who have joined the Society. If your membership has expired, please review the Society's objectives and activities and consider supporting them by renewing today. A membership form is enclosed with this newsletter. Thank you!

We Invite Your Contributions

This newsletter can benefit from your ideas, big or small. We invite you to send in your articles, reflections, poems, stories, quotes, graphics, artwork, photos or comments.

If you have a question of Dhamma or meditation practice, then we will forward it to Ajahn Sona, who has agreed to respond to such queries. We can learn from each other by sharing our experiences and understanding.

News from Others - Upcoming Visit by S.N. Goenka

S.N. Goenka, the internationally renowned teacher of meditation, is in

North America from April to August to teach and speak about the ancient meditation practice of Vipassana, a simple, practical way to achieve real peace of mind.

As part of the tour, Mr. Goenka will give a public talk in Ottawa on Wednesday, July 24th at 7:30 p.m. at Alumni Theatre, Southam Hall, Carleton University (jointly sponsored by Carleton University's College of the Humanities (Religion) and the Ottawa Vipassana Group).

A video on Vipassana meditation will be shown in the auditorium of the Ottawa Public Library, 120 Metcalfe (at Laurier Ave. West), Wednesday, June 19, 2002 at 7:30 pm.

For more info visit: www.MeditationNow.org or call (613) 624-5471 email: shayes@primus.ca

OTTAWA BUDDHIST SOCIETY

ADDRESS:

c/o 405B MacKay Street,
Ottawa, K1M 2C5

TELEPHONE:

(613) 741-7741

E-MAIL:

obs_secretary@yahoo.ca

WWW:

<http://www.geocities.com/obswebs/>

CHARITY NO.

BN 11907 1256 RR 0001

OTTAWA BUDDHIST SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP FORM

The Society serves Theravada Buddhists of all nationalities in and around Ottawa. All who support the Society and its objectives are welcome to Society events and to enroll as members.

The objectives of the Society are:

- (a) To propagate, promote and advance the teachings of the Buddha by practising the religious observances, tenets and doctrines of Buddhism, with emphasis on those of Theravada Buddhism, and to promote the practice of these teachings in everyday life.
- (b) To promote an awareness of the contributions made by Buddhism to humankind's intellectual advancement, and spiritual and physical well-being.
- (c) To engage in charitable activities within Canada to alleviate suffering, whether physical, mental or spiritual, without regard to the species, gender, race, nationality or religion of the sufferer.

I would like to enroll as a member of the Ottawa Buddhist Society.

PLEASE PRINT

Name: _____ Tel: _____

Address: _____

eMail: _____

Signature: _____ Date _____

Annual Dues (please indicate whether membership is [New] or a [Renewal] and circle type below):

Single: (\$25); Family: (\$50); Friend (\$10 - newsletter only) Full-Time Student: (free)

Donation: \$ _____ To Be Used For: _____ Payment Enclosed: \$ _____

Please mail this with your payment to the Treasurer, Ottawa Buddhist Society, 1 Hime Crescent
Ottawa, Ont. K1G 4R8. For more information about the Society contact Oli at obs_secretary@yahoo.ca or Hoa at nhuhoang@mondenet.com or (819) 770-7888.

VOLUNTEERS FOR OTTAWA BUDDHIST SOCIETY

Ottawa Buddhist Society is looking for volunteers to help with the following activities:
organization of retreats; days of mindfulness; social events; charitable projects; newsletter; website.
Please indicate whether you are able to volunteer for any of those activities
