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Vesak 99 Newsletter

The Ottawa Buddhist Society serves Theravada Buddhists of all nationalities. All Buddhists and non-Buddhists are welcome to join the Society

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.

***Happy Vesak to all beings.
May all beings, without exception, have happy
peaceful minds.***

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Would you like to submit an article for the Ottawa Buddhist Society's Newsletter? Anything that would be of interest to the general Buddhist community is welcome: Poetry, art, short stories, quotes, a passage from your readings, personal experiences; visits to monasteries; biographies;

questions that you would like to ask a monk; letters to the editor; announcements about your meditation group; book reviews; TV programs; events; news items; listing of your Buddhist group. Send your article by email as a Word or WordPerfect document, or as a text document.

THE NOBLE EIGHTFOLD PATH

Based on a talk given by *Ven. Yogavacharya Rahula* at an OBS retreat at Tucker House, Rockland, Ontario, 29 Nov.1998. Transcribed by *Dexter Sampson*.

Bhante Rahula was born in California. In 1972 he began a long odyssey starting in Scandinavia, and passing through India and Nepal, and ending in Sri Lanka where he ordained as a monk in 1975. He spent 10 years in Sri Lanka and then returned to the US. He now is a senior monk at the Bhavana Center in West Virginia.

Bhante Rahula includes special yoga exercises in his meditation instructions.

Mindfulness is the path to the deathless.

Mindlessness is the path to death.

The mindful do not die.

The unmindful are as dead already.

- The Buddha

These verses from the Dhammapada sum up the real practice of the dhamma. Essentially they sum up the eightfold path which is the fourth of the four noble truths. It is the path that leads to the cessation of suffering, dukkha. How do we relate meditation and the practice of dhamma to daily life? Actually the eightfold path is a kind of meditation, the practice of mindfulness.

Lets say you want to go somewhere, say to the end of suffering. If you want to drive somewhere in your car you need a map. You need to know where you are going and you need to know the best roads to take you there. In the practise of Dhamma the four noble truths and the eightfold path are our road map. Everything has been mapped out for us by all the previous Buddhas who have travelled that way.

1. Right Understanding of Dhamma.

We need to know what is involved in practising the Dhamma, what we are up against. This occurs on two levels. First is intellectual understanding that we gain through listening to talks and reading books. There are a lot of new ideas in the Dhamma like the four noble truths, impermanence, suffering, no-self, kamma, rebirth and nibbana that are new ideas for most people, especially westerners. We don't learn

these things in school. So we become interested but soon forget them as we get caught up in our fast paced ordinary life.

In order to deepen our interest in the Dhamma we need the second level of right understanding which comes through contemplation and reflection. Practise continually thinking about the Dhamma.

2. Right Thoughts, Right Aspirations, Right Intentions.

These are three expressions to translate one Pali term. We will use Right Thoughts.

Start thinking about the Dhamma on three levels. First, thoughts of renunciation, simplifying ones life. The more possessions we have, the more worries we have. A lot of things we think we need are actually burdens. Reduce activities and belongings. Let go of unnecessary baggage. Let go of worries, of clinging to the past and projecting into the future. Develop generosity, dana, sharing with others.

Second, develop thoughts of non ill will. We spend a lot of time thinking ill towards persons who have hurt us. These thoughts become a kind of poison to our mind. Right thought means not ill will but compassion.

Third, develop thoughts of non cruelty, of not harming. This is based on the understanding that all beings are seeking happiness. According to the law of kamma, if we harm others, it rebounds upon ourselves. Instead, develop loving kindness. Renunciation leads to thoughts of giving. Selfishness is considered one of the deepest poisons of mind.

3. Right Speech.

We can cause a lot of harm with our mouths. It is said that each person is born with an axe in his mouth. We cut other people down with our tongues. Speech can wound more than bullets or a knife. Avoid lying, tale bearing, gossip, back biting, slanderous speech, harsh speech, and idle or frivolous talk. Cultivate truthfulness, wholesome speech, kind and gentle speech. Know when to speak and when to keep silent. Use words that lift people up rather than putting them down.

4. Right Action.

Basically this requires following the five precepts: refrain from killing, from stealing, from sexual misconduct, from bad speech and

from intoxicants. Breaking the five precepts is the cause of 99.9% of the suffering in the world. The Buddha highly praised those who follow the five precepts. The catch is you can not follow the five precepts without developing mindfulness.

5. Right Livelihood.

This requires you to earn your living without breaking the five precepts and without impinging on others in a negative way. Don't sell weapons or poisons or intoxicating drinks or drugs that cause other people to destroy their minds. Don't kill animals. There are many different forms of vice. Many jobs use deceit, fraud and lying. These are to be avoided in business. Greed will make people do anything, even sell their mothers.

Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood are the steps in the path directly related to generating good kamma.

6. Right Effort.

This is directed toward developing wholesome states of mind and overcoming unwholesome states of mind. There are four kinds.

1. The effort to cultivate wholesome states of mind that we do not already have.
2. The effort to maintain wholesome states of mind that we already have.
3. The effort to overcome unwholesome states we already have.
4. The effort to prevent new unwholesome states from arising in our minds.

Meditation is said to be the most beneficial state of mind in terms of generating good kamma. The Buddha said that developing the perception of impermanence, even for a finger snap, is more beneficial than giving an ocean full of gems to the needy.

7. Right Mindfulness.

This is essentially knowing what you are doing in your life - knowing what the body is doing and knowing what the mind is doing. By cultivating mindfulness we come to know what states are arising in our minds so that we can apply the right corrective effort.

8. Right Concentration.

Traditionally this is attaining the four absorptions, the four jhana states. These are very difficult meditative states for a lay person who lacks the tranquil life and seclusion of a monk.

Another way to approach it for a lay person is to develop non wavering of mind, stability of mind, calmness, a relaxed mind focused on the Dhamma and not distracted by useless things. It is being focused on all aspects of the eightfold path.

The eightfold path is often likened to a wheel with eight spokes, the Dhamma Wheel. The Buddha preached this in his first sermon given at Sarnath. Each spoke has to be strong or the wheel will wobble. So we must practice all eight steps but three are the most important: right understanding, right mindfulness and right effort. We can't do anything without right understanding. It is the key factor which tells us whether each of the other seven is right or wrong. It knows wrong understanding as wrong and right understanding as right. It knows that our actions have effects. When, through mindfulness, we see wrong understanding arising, we apply right effort to achieve right understanding. Mindfulness isolates the thought. Understanding determines whether it is right or wrong. Effort enables us to make the right choice such as to abandon the idea to tell a lie or to slander someone. It is the same with right action or the other precepts such as not to kill or steal. Right understanding says no, these thoughts are unwholesome, so we apply right effort to cultivate right action. Even with effort right understanding knows wrong effort as wrong and right effort as right. Even with mindfulness, right understanding knows what is right mindfulness and what is wrong. Wrong mindfulness sees everything as permanent, desirable and beautiful. Right mindfulness analyses things into their component parts to help us overcome cravings. It sees everything as anicca, anatta and dukkha (impermanent, without an eternal soul, and unsatisfactory). When we get a pain in the knee while meditating, right mindfulness says it is not a pain in our knee, which is a personal thing, but that it is just a sensation of pain.

Sometimes the practice of Dhamma is ineffective because people don't have a right understanding of it. Each person can mould the practice to suite his own abilities or needs. Some might say, "I practice meditation for twenty minutes each day." This is another kind of misconception. One practices meditation for your whole life. When you integrate the eightfold path into your life, and as you can see, the eightfold path is meditation, so one's whole life can be the

practice of meditation. I leave you with these thoughts for your reflection.

RUMINATIONS OF A (RECOVERED)
WORKAHOLIC. *Elisabeth Perz*

I'll start with the bottom line: There IS life - an abundance of it - in the 'post-job rebirth!' I am a beneficiary of this 1990's phenomenon/scourge called re-structuring/down-sizing. At the time this happened to me, I admit, I did not fully grasp the 'beneficent' aspects of my particular situation; after all, 32 years in the workforce is a long time. It came as a bit of a shock to realize how much of my identify and, sadly perhaps, *raison d'être*, was absorbed into this crazy notion called 'building a career'.

Now that I have had the time to catch my breath (literally and figuratively), the notion that nothing in life happens coincidentally, is no longer an abstract concept for me. I can attest to its truth. I never took the time in all these years to reflect on the fact that we all walk on a specific path where good, bad and indifferent things happen along the way and that there really is no getting off this particular train!

Four years ago, after a number of years of living on the periphery of and ruminating about 'Eastern Philosophy' but never quite taking the leap, I finally became a more committed Buddhist meditator. I now know that this particular step was no coincidence. I also know that it was no coincidence either that, on a random Sunday afternoon last August, I walked by the Albion Street Vietnamese Buddhist Temple and, by a whim and out of sheer curiosity, walked up and through the door. And because one thing inevitably leads to another thing, just today I completed my second silent retreat Saturday with the Ottawa Buddhist sangha where I feel so warmly received.

Now I am in the process of learning to walk, mindful step by step, my path with more care, reverence and gratitude. I no longer measure my time in terms of 'things to do, people to see, objectives to achieve'; but I am rediscovering the inherent wisdom which lies in the simplicity and ordinary-ness of every day life.

All of this to assure/encourage anyone who may be in a similar boat I found myself in some 8 months ago: Sometimes one has to take the leap into the unknown and close a door, in order for

another door to open. And the 'other door', inevitably, will open.

"One can believe that the sound of silence is something, or that it is an attainment. Yet, it is not a matter of having attained anything, but of wisely reflecting on what you experience. The way to reflect is that anything that comes goes; and the practice is one of knowing things as they are." Ajahn Sumedho from *The Way It Is*
Contributed by *Marie-Jean Schirra*.

Bodhisattvas
Vinh D. Nguyen is an engineer working in Ottawa, he practices Buddhism in the Lin Chi's lineage and is a student of Thich Nhat Hanh. One of Vinh's aspirations is to form and nurture a non-sectarian sangha in Ottawa where ones can practice mindfulness together and help each other in the path of practice.

"...Bodhisattvas are awakened beings. We also have our nature of awakening, no less than they, but we have to train ourselves. One way is to practice invoking the names of four great bodhisattvas - Avalokiteshvara (Regarder of the Cries of the World), Manjushri (Great Understanding), Samantabhadra (Universal Goodness), and Kshitigarbha (Earth Store). When we recite their names in a deep, relaxed way, every word can touch our hearts and the hearts of those listening. In the beginning, we still feel separate from these bodhisattvas. But, practicing steadily, we realize that we are Avalokiteshvara, Manjushri, Samantabhadra, and Kshitigarbha. It is not important whether they were historic figures, born in such and such year or in such or such a place. The key is to realize their qualities within ourselves..."

(Thich Nhat Hanh)

Evocation of the Bodhisattvas' names We invoke your name, Avalokiteshvara. We aspire to learn your way of listening in order to help relieve the suffering in the world. You know how to listen in order to understand. We invoke your name in order to practice listening with all our attention and open-heartedness. We will sit and listen without any prejudice. We will sit and listen without judging or reacting. We will sit and listen in order to understand. We will sit and listen so attentively that we will be able to hear what the other person is saying and also what is being left unsaid. We know that just by listening deeply we already alleviate a great deal of pain and suffering in the other person.

We invoke your name, Manjushri. We aspire to learn your way, which is to be still and to look deeply into the heart of things and into the hearts of people. We will look with all our attention and open-heartedness. We will look with unprejudiced eyes. We will look without judging or reacting. We will look deeply so that we will be able to see and understand the roots of suffering, the impermanent and selfless nature of all that is. We will practice your way of using the sword of understanding to cut through the bonds of suffering, thus freeing ourselves and other species.

We invoke your name, Samantabhadra. We aspire to practice your vow to act with the eyes and heart of compassion; to bring joy to one person in the morning and to ease the pain of one person in the afternoon. We know that the happiness of others is our own happiness, and we aspire to practice joy on the path of service. We know that every word, every look, every action, and every smile can bring happiness to others. We know that if we practice whole-heartedly, we ourselves may become an inexhaustible source of peace and joy for our loved ones and for all species.

We invoke your name, Kshitigarbha. We aspire to learn your way of being present where there is darkness, suffering, oppression and despair, so that we may bring light, hope, relief, and liberation to those places. We are determined not to forget about or abandon those who are in desperate situations. We will do our best to establish contact with them when they cannot find a way out of their suffering and when their cries for help, justice, equality, and human rights are not heard. We know that hell can be found in many places on Earth, and we do not want to contribute to making more hells on Earth. We will do our best to help transform the hells that already exist. We will practice in order to realize the qualities of perseverance and stability, so that, like the earth, we can always be supportive and faithful to those in need.

THE ART OF LISTENING

Ian Prattis is a meditation teacher trained in Vedic, Buddhist and Shamanic traditions. In the Ottawa area he has taught Children's courses, adult courses and advanced meditation courses. he has also taught meditation in India, the United States and South America. The basic commitment he holds is to make the world a

beautiful place by encouraging people to be their true selves. His teaching focuses on the spiritual issues of the day, and he honors all traditions.

In our journey of meditation we train in different wisdom traditions, all of which lead us to practice mindfulness as our integrity of truth. There are, however, two ways in which we can regard the training received from our teachers. We can treat them as a jacket or coat that we put on and take off whenever it is convenient to do so, or we can feel that the teachings are an internal part of ourselves that we never discard. From the teachings as a coat of convenience, only posture and illusion can emerge through our behavior. From the internal viewpoint there is the flowering of personal transformation, and the power to transform others. By listening inside to the truth of the teachings received and putting them into practice in our daily lives we nurture within ourselves the consciousness of Buddha, the energy of Christ, the energy of Krishna and of the Creator. There are a number of things we can do so that the nurturing process becomes rooted in our beings. In this chapter I am going to write about a very important precept from the teachings of the Buddha which will enable us to catch the consciousness of all the great masters and teachers that lie dormant within us. It is about learning to listen deeply and also how to speak lovingly from a foundation of internal compassion. It is about training ourselves to enact the Fourth Precept of the Buddha. Before I state this precept allow me to talk to you about what is involved.

When was the last time anybody really listened to you? Maybe it was your dog or your cat, because no matter what you say to them they are certain to love you. Even your pet fish is certain to love you and be totally present when you talk to her. Yet when was the last time that anyone really listened to what you wanted to say? Now examine the other side of the coin - When was the last time that you really listened to someone else? Often when we speak to someone, we know they are formulating rebuttals while we speak, or they are thinking about laundry lists, telephone calls or shopping trips. That person is not truly present with us. For our own part, we often have strong perceptions of the other and it is our perceptions that we listen to, not the other communicating to us. So our listening is filled with judgements and assumptions, which are what we take away from the conversation because we have not listened deeply to the person. To truly listen requires

that we find a way to drop our perceptions and judgements in order that we can be truly present for the other. In that way we may be able to understand the other very deeply and at the same time be of great support and service, simply because of our understanding and capacity to listen deeply and compassionately. It does, however, take training and the training is through the practice of meditation so that we learn for ourselves how to be still and calm within. When we experience stillness in meditation we do not place our judgements on what is presented to us. We choose to occupy the consciousness of our heart and in that energy do not distort what is said. When we do not have stillness, then we twist what we hear and thread it through and around our prejudices and judgements. That is why we need to practice meditation so we may learn how to be still, how to be present and truly there for the other. In this way we are not trapped in our fears, prejudices and projections.

Unfortunately in our very busy world, the art of listening is not a skill that is encouraged. We do not listen and others do not listen to us, mostly because we have not been taught how to do so. I remember a time several years ago when I was dealing with a number of personal issues that were quite painful. When some friends asked me "How are you Ian?" I would start to tell them the truth as to how I was. I was having an awful time and was in a real mess, but my friends did not know how to listen. They were uncomfortable and also non-supportive. I would say "Well you wanted to know how I am, so I am telling you" - but they did not know how to listen at that time. So there are very important things about deep and compassionate listening that we are not very skilled at doing. Training is required, basic steps are needed so that we can become skillful and train ourselves to really listen. I think back to times with my children when they had really important things to say to me and I was too busy, I did not stop to give them my full presence. I did not really listen. Many years after, now that they are all grown up, I have said to them individually "I remember the time you said such and such to me and I did not really listen to you."

They are always astonished;"You remember that, Dad?" It touches them very deeply that I can now be clear about occasions that I did not listen to them. It also touches me deeply. But it is not just our children that we do not listen to - we do not listen to our partners, our colleagues or our

friends. So we must remedy the situation by learning the art of listening. It is so important, for if we can listen deeply and be present for someone when they speak to us, then we can alleviate and transform their suffering and our own. Just by listening from the stillness and consciousness of our hearts.

There is a story I have adapted from Thich Nhat Hanh's dharma talks. It is about a child who had very rich and successful parents. His mother was a prominent lawyer, his father was the CEO of a large engineering company. The young boy had his eleventh birthday coming up. His father came home from work and told his son that he had airline tickets for his birthday so he could fly down to Disneyland in Florida where one of his colleagues would meet him and take him out for the day. Wouldn't that be great fun? The boy said "I don't want that daddy". His mother came in from the living room and said she had all the latest Super Mario video games that he could play in his room for as long as he liked. The boy said "I don't want that mummy". The parents looked surprised and finally asked their child "What is it that you want?" The little boy said "I want you". All he wanted was the full presence of his mother and father, not expensive gifts or trips, simply the presence of his mother, the presence of his father. If we are insightful as parents we may realize that is the greatest gift we can give to our children. To love our children is to be present and this is the most precious gift we can give to them, because it opens everyone's experience to the wonder and joy of being. Everything is available through our true and full presence. We can begin to know about full presence through meditation, which is the practice of being with our true nature, then it becomes easy to fully be with others.

Being present, listening deeply from a compassionate heart, speaking lovingly as a daily practice - this is what the Fourth Precept of the Buddha is about.

The Fourth Precept of the Buddha.

Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful speech and the inability to listen to others, I vow to cultivate loving speech and deep listening in order to bring joy and happiness to others and relieve others of their suffering. Knowing that words can create happiness or suffering, I vow to learn to speak truthfully, with words that inspire self-confidence, joy and hope. I am

determined not to spread news that I do not know to be certain and not to criticize or condemn things of which I am not sure. I will refrain from uttering words that can cause division or discord, or that can cause the family or the community to break. I will make all efforts to reconcile and resolve all conflicts, however small.

We must understand and learn the full significance of this very powerful guideline from the Buddha. This is all about what we do with our speech and with the quality of our presence, and what I am saying to you is that what we usually do is not enough and often very unwise. To enter the practice of listening deeply we have to nourish and water the seeds of silence and compassion in our hearts. That often takes training for we have many hurts and angers inside ourselves that make it difficult to deeply listen to others. So we must learn to take care of our sorrows and pain. This is what the practice of meditation is for. I remember my Buddhist teacher, Thich Nhat Hanh, stating very clearly that while we have the right to be angry, to feel overwhelmed by strong emotions we do not have the right to not practice. This is particularly pertinent in a discussion of the Fourth Precept. We do in fact contain all the positive and negative seeds of experience within us. We learn how to take care of the negative seeds by watering the positive seeds that are also there. We all know that there is anger, grief, alienation and despair within each one of us, yet sometimes forget that we also have seeds of self awareness, compassion, understanding and mindfulness that are also there within us. When anger is triggered and rises up into our consciousness and starts to take over our speech, thoughts and actions it is very dangerous - both for ourselves and for the others we necessarily project it onto. On those occasions when anger threatens to overwhelm us, that is when we must call upon the seeds of mindfulness, self awareness and compassion so that we can take care of our anger. We can do this by surrounding our anger with mindfulness and being aware that it would be wise to perhaps do walking meditation, or to hug a tree in the forest and ask mother earth to help us develop strength and insight. This is to generate calm first of all, then compassion for the person who has triggered an internal wound and to see deeply into the nature of that wound so that it heals - that is taking care of our anger and seeing deeply into ourselves. The energy of mindfulness penetrates the energy of anger and diffuses it.

One thing, however, has to be in place before this will work. The seed of mindfulness, the seed of self awareness, the seed of compassion must have had some prior attention and cultivation.

I remember a time quite recently when I became very angry. A dear friend had been verbally attacked at a directors' meeting of an organization I am associated with. The attack on her was mostly due to the fact that the real object of attack (myself) was not present! As I learned of how my friend had been treated I became very angry. But rather than follow the impulse to act on the anger I did walking and sitting meditation to calm myself down, and then began to examine the anger inside me. I had reacted to what I had perceived to be a cowardly injustice done to a friend. I saw that the roots of this reaction lay in the injustices done to me, and further investigation lead me to see clearly my lack of forgiveness for people in my past who had been unjust and cowardly (or so it had seemed at the time!) So I had work to do - which lay in the area of walking a mile in other people's shoes, understanding their situation and finding a drop of the nectar of compassion for them. But if I had not been taught what to do about anger and distress, I could have very easily set in motion a chain reaction of anger and suffering. I am very grateful to my teachers for giving me tools of meditation to use in situations like this. If we have not practiced meditation, then the positive seeds within us have not been watered and they are not strong enough to make any difference to the anger that overwhelms us. This means that to not practice is irresponsible and unwise, for there are so many occasions when we need to summon up the positive seeds within us. And if we have not bothered to strengthen the seeds of compassion and mindfulness

within us through meditation, then we do not have the tools to deal with anger, despair and other deep hurts. It is essential to put in the mileage with daily meditative practice, particularly when we are feeling good and well. That is the time to commit ourselves to the fidelity of practice, so that we build a strong seed of mindfulness within us, a strong seed of compassion within us. This is how we become internally strong. Without it we cannot listen deeply to another's pain for that will only feed our own pain, and we are then of little or no use to the friend who desperately needs us to listen

to them from a compassionate heart. We do not suddenly have the skills to deeply listen, we need to build them up through our meditative practice. That is why Thich Nhat Hanh is so clear and firm when he talks to his students about their not having the right to not practice. When we realize that there is so much at stake within ourselves, within our loved ones and friends, the planet and within the world - his message is absolutely clear. With practice we equip ourselves for the task of transformation - of ourselves, our loved ones and the world. Rather than succumb to the energy of suffering, we can choose to retrain ourselves through meditative practice to know what to do about the energy of suffering ignited by anger, despair and other negative seeds. To become still we must learn how to stop. This is where the seed of mindfulness takes us, preparing us to be fully present. This is always the first stage of meditation, whatever the tradition, for without stopping we can not enter the stillness of the heart and see clearly what we must understand about ourselves and about others. So in meditation we nourish all the wonderful and positive elements within us so that we gain internal strength and spiritual maturity that then enables us to deal effectively with the addictions and negative energies that are also there. This first stage of stopping is very important. For if we are listening to a dear friend and their sorrow ignites our own pain and hidden wounds, we must have the self awareness to stop. Then say to our friend that "Sorrow is rising up in me and I must take care of it, do you mind dear friend if we postpone our talk until I have the strength to truly support you?" And that is when you return to your practice of meditation so that your listening can be deep and your speech loving. The ability to discern this is a vital part of stopping. The importance of stopping and then being mindful is revealed in a wonderful story about the Buddha.

There was a man that lived on the edge of a village. Everyone in the surrounding region was terrified of him as he would kill people. Consequently, no one traveled the road in front of his house. This man had a necklace of thumbs from all the people that he had killed. At the time of the story he had 998 thumbs. He decided that the day the person called the Buddha walked on his road that he would kill him. Then he would have 1000 thumbs on his necklace. One day the Buddha and his monks were approaching this village. All of the Buddha's followers

tried to discourage the Buddha from walking by this man's home but the Buddha would not listen to them. As he passed in front of the murderer's home, the man came out and told the Buddha to stop.

The Buddha responded saying "I have stopped" and kept on walking. The man called after him again to stop. Once more the Buddha said that he had stopped and continued walking. By now the man was absolutely furious and ran in front of the Buddha with his sword raised high in the air ready to kill the Buddha. He yelled at the Buddha "I told you to stop! You tell me you have stopped and then you keep walking. I'm telling you to stop or else I will kill you with this sword." The Buddha quietly responded "I have stopped. I have stopped being angry. I have stopped hating. I have stopped being jealous. I have stopped cravings. I have stopped". The Buddha paused for a moment and then said to the man "When are you going to stop?" With that the man was flooded with insight and realization about who was standing in front of him, totally unafraid of his raised sword. He prostrated on the ground before the Buddha and asked him to teach him. The Buddha asked the man to stand up and responded that he would teach him. The story goes on to say that in a few short years of diligent effort this man reached full enlightenment.

When we speak to people, our words and energy often have the power to lift them up or to crash them down. Very often in our conversations and communications we choose to crash them down and fly in the face of all the implications of the Buddha's Fourth Precept. We may feel smug and powerful for a moment, but our behavior does not allow us to touch that consciousness which brings happiness. When we cannot listen deeply, we then cannot speak kindly. Sometime in the next week write down how many times you thought or spoke ill of somebody the previous day. You may be surprised at the list you have. We will come to the second part of this exercise later in this chapter. For now, you may realize that when you think ill of somebody, or speak ill of them, it takes up so much energy just to keep the judgements, perceptions and negativity going.

Furthermore, while you continue to fuel the prejudiced feelings within you, you may also come to realize that this practice does not allow you to be present, which is the only location

where life is fully available. When we are present we discover that our natural flow is to be compassionate and loving. That is what we are when we choose to rest in our true nature. It takes no energy to be compassionate. It takes no energy to be loving. It does, however, take a lot of energy to bad mouth or to slam people with what we think, say and do. And people are wounded by it and then proceed to hurt others for this energy demands to be shared - as does the energy of love and compassion. We can choose. So what is it to be? We can stop the prejudice within us from translating into harmful action. We can choose to journey to the consciousness of the heart, we can choose to speak mindfully and express ourselves in a way that does not cause division and harm.

Listening Deeply, Speaking Compassionately - this could be your new mantra. It is important to be self aware about how we do both. It is unfortunate that we have so many bad examples around us. Our elected representatives do not speak mindfully or listen deeply to anyone, they are mindful only of public opinion polls and their re-election. The icons from the sports, entertainment and media domains present posture rather than truth and we know that most of them lie. So can we not set an example for them by speaking the truth, by coming from the heart? We arrive at the consciousness of the heart through meditation. Every time we meditate and are mindful we leave our head and ego behind for a moment, and journey to the embrace of the heart.

We put our busyness aside, we become present and cease running away from our true nature as we learn to stop. That is the basic practice of meditation, to take us to the freedom of being fully alive in the present moment. In that moment meditation nourishes us beautifully, for we gain strength from all the positive elements within us that are being cultivated. As we nurture these elements their energy becomes stronger and allows us to more readily dissipate the energies of our afflictions and sufferings. We see deeply into our habits and patterns in the stillness of meditation and can deal with them when our mindfulness and practice is strong. At the same time we appreciate more and more how much we enjoy life by being present. From that place we can listen and speak. When we learn to do this with our children, friends and others that may be in some form of distress, we can heal them. For through deep listening we can

understand our dear friend, who so appreciates that she has someone willing to just be with her, silently listening in heart consciousness. This beautiful form of compassionate communication heals the other and relieves their suffering. Yet we must be practical about all this rather than expecting that we can just sit down and do it without prior training in meditation. Thich Nhat Hanh talks about this in his dharma talk Protecting Our Children which was given on August 7, 1998 in Plum Village:

"We need to train for a long time in order to be able to do this. Even if the other person accuses you, even if the other person is full of wrong perceptions, even if the other person accuses you unjustly, is always reproaching you, you keep your compassion alive, and you are able to stay by them, silently, calmly. Your business is to listen, even if there is no truth, no justice in what they are saying. If you can listen like that for an hour like that it is already a wonderful help to the other person. You are the best kind of psychotherapist, because you have the capacity to listen with compassion, just to listen. You don't have to say anything. Even if the other person says very foolish things, if all his perceptions are wrong, even if she accuses you, you always follow your breath and keep calm, because you are playing the role of Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva, listening in order to relieve the suffering. This is something that anyone can do. If you practice mindful breathing, sitting meditation, walking meditation for a week, you will be able to acquire the capacity to listen deeply to the other person. And with the practice of deep listening goes the practice of loving speech."

The capacity to listen deeply is a powerful energy of healing; just listen, very often you will have no advice or solutions to offer, but know that your deep listening heals. I remember being in Glasgow, Scotland a number of years ago and spending time with my son Alexander, who had become deeply mired in Glasgow's drug world. I stayed with him in his home which I called Punk Palace. It was inhabited by a loose collection of punks and drug dealers who referred to themselves as "The Tribe" - all of whom were lost and wounded young people. I had very few answers for them, but I listened. I was the only parent to have ever visited them, let alone live with them, but I listened to what they had to say. The simple act of listening deeply as they poured out their problems and issues was healing. When asked to give advice I would talk to them

about responsibility and power; that with responsibility comes power. If they wanted power over their lives they had to take responsibility for themselves. Listening deeply to each one of these young people was enriching for me as it had an energy I was not previously aware of. By stopping and using my breath to stay calm, I listened to them with the compassion of my heart rather than with the judgements that could be found in my head.

When we listen from the heart and speak from the heart we share an energy that is deeply healing. Most of the time we talk - yip yap, yip yap, yip yap, yah de dah, yah de dah - endlessly from the head. It is all about nothing and is surprisingly popular. The television series "Seinfeld" is, as Jerry Seinfeld points out, "Just about absolutely nothing!" There is no depth to it and that is what we have become entrained to expect in our lives. Therefore we must retrain ourselves to speak volumes from the heart rather than talk nothing from the head. I would like to distinguish speaking from talking in terms of location of consciousness. We speak from the heart and talk from the head. So we clearly know the source of consciousness for television "Talk Shows!" Speaking is when we choose to stop, take mindful steps into the heart and communicate the energy of healing and transformation. It is so powerful, and the Buddha caught on to it twenty six hundred years ago. Within the Fourth Precept lies an ethical guideline to monitor the quality of how we listen and speak. We have a very practical basis here for the practice of mindfulness, shaped into a precept for daily living. This ancient precept is as relevant to the present day as it was in the Buddha's time.

Two friends, Don and Martha Rosenthal, have fashioned what I have been writing about into a design for listening and speaking which serves as a wonderful blueprint for handling conflict and tensions between individuals. They call it Open hearted Listening and teach it in seminars across North America. They title their seminar The Noble Adventure. They have devised a protocol that can be used very successfully between couples, business partners, parents and children and between siblings.

I will provide an encapsulated version of their training, which is very much in the spirit of the Fourth Precept of the Buddha. Let us say I am working on a project with a colleague. Catherine

is her name. We have a contract between us about Open Hearted Listening, that if either one of us feels that they would like the other to listen to them with an open heart then the other agrees. We have different ways of approaching the project, and my approach causes great irritation and frustration for Catherine. I do not turn up to work on time, I often appear to be in a dream world, forget things and seem not to pay attention to what Catherine is contributing to the project. As we will see most of our perceptions about the other are wrong, but we allow ourselves to get so frustrated and angry through the perceptions we hold dear. Open Hearted Listening provides a forum for our perceptions to be put to one side. Because of our contract with one another when Catherine is frustrated and upset with me and asks if I would listen to her with an open heart, I consent. We set a time and place and my job as the listener is to place myself in my heart, and I do this with meditation. I then simply listen to whatever Catherine has to say. I do not interrupt or defend myself, or say she is right or wrong. I just listen. If I find I cannot maintain my calm with breath, that my own scars are being triggered by what is said, I am then of no use to my colleague. So I will say "Catherine I am having trouble staying in heart consciousness, could we postpone this until such time as I can center myself?" And then we would set another time and I would apply myself to cultivating the seeds of mindfulness within myself. It is essential that I remain in the energy of compassion, the territory of the heart, for this process to work. When I can do this, I can then be fully present for Catherine. It often happens that half way through this process Catherine will realize for herself "My goodness, Ian is listening to me with undivided attention!"

Because I am listening to her from the consciousness of my heart there is an energy that will lift the energy of stress and frustration that Catherine is feeling towards me, whatever her perceptions may have been. So the first part of this process is for me to listen deeply to whatever Catherine says to me. It does not matter whether I think it is right or wrong, I do not intervene to defend myself - I just listen. This is the first part - to deeply listen. The second part is to mirror back to Catherine everything she has said to me. "Yes Catherine I hear you about your frustration that I come to work late, that I do not appear to listen to you or be aware of your contributions to the project

etc." I am not allowed to take any shortcuts or to make myself look better. I fully mirror back to Catherine her comments to me. The thirdstep, and a very important one, is to validate how Catherine is feeling. I would say calmly and gently something like: "Catherine, given what you have said to me, I do understand how angry and frustrated you must be feeling." By this time the energy of deep listening and compassionate speech has worked its magic on both of us - for it touches the seeds of compassion and understanding in both parties. At this point we become so grateful to have one another as colleagues on this project, and once again we can become friends. As we talk and share more I can state how much I appreciate her contribution to the project, that my lateness is often because I am doing my best to see clearly some of the problems in the project design by doing walking meditation along the river. That this gives me insight in our work together but not the insight that I should have told her about it! And so on with the threads of reconnection.

This type of exercise is very effective not only with colleagues, it works wonderfully well between couples, between parents and children and siblings. It is based on deep, compassionate listening and loving speech, and is healing and very transformative. Often half way through the first part of the process when the listener is truly present, the speaker will know they are being fully heard and often run out of things to say. The energy of compassion lifts the energy of distress because people are so desperate to simply be heard and listened to. With our attitudes, self righteousness and busyness we silence our children, we silence our partners and lose so much in the process. Open Hearted Listening is just one way of making the Buddha's Fourth Precept alive and well in the modern world. It is a retraining of ourselves - to listen deeply, to acknowledge how the other must be feeling, and to find a deep strength within. What it calls for is an ability to meditate and to return to the heart, because once you are in that consciousness you are strong. When you are in your head you can be pushed and pulled around by your judgements, expectations and by the confrontations and opinions of others, but when you are in your heart you are in your true nature and strength. I have the strength to listen to whatever Catherine says to me, because I know it is important to deeply listen to her.

ONE TOOL AMONG MANY

The Place of Vipassana in Buddhist Practice
by *Thanissaro Bhikkhu*

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What exactly is vipassana?

Almost any book on early Buddhist meditation will tell you that the Buddha taught two types of meditation: samatha and vipassana. Samatha, which means tranquility, is said to be a method fostering strong states of mental absorption, called jhana. Vipassana -- literally "clear-seeing," but more often translated as insight meditation -- is said to be a method using a modicum of tranquility to foster moment-to-moment mindfulness of the inconstancy of events as they are directly experienced in the present. This mindfulness creates a sense of dispassion toward all events, thus leading the mind to release from suffering. These two methods are quite separate, we're told, and of the two, vipassana is the distinctive Buddhist contribution to meditative science. Other systems of practice pre-dating the Buddha also taught samatha, but the Buddha was the first to discover and teach vipassana. Although some Buddhist meditators may practice samatha meditation before turning to vipassana, samatha practice is not really necessary for the pursuit of Awakening. As a meditative tool, the vipassana method is sufficient for attaining the goal. Or so we're told.

But if you look directly at the Pali discourses -- the earliest extant sources for our knowledge of the Buddha's teachings -- you'll find that although they do use the word samatha to mean tranquility, and vipassana to mean clear-seeing, they otherwise confirm none of the received wisdom about these terms. Only rarely do they make use of the word vipassana -- a sharp contrast to their frequent use of the word jhana. When they depict the Buddha telling his disciples to go meditate, they never quote him

as saying "go do vipassana," but always "go do jhana." And they never equate the word vipassana with any mindfulness techniques. In the few instances where they do mention vipassana, they almost always pair it with samatha -- not as two alternative methods, but as two qualities of mind that a person may "gain" or "be endowed with," and that should be developed together. One simile, for instance (S.XXXV.204), compares samatha and vipassana to a swift pair of messengers who enter the citadel of the body via the noble eightfold path and present their accurate report -- Unbinding, or nibbana -- to the consciousness acting as the citadel's commander. Another passage (A.X.71) recommends that anyone who wishes to put an end to mental defilement should -- in addition to perfecting the principles of moral behavior and cultivating seclusion -- be committed to samatha and endowed with vipassana. This last statement is unremarkable in itself, but the same discourse also gives the same advice to anyone who wants to master the jhanas: be committed to samatha and endowed with vipassana. This suggests that, in the eyes of those who assembled the Pali discourses, samatha, jhana, and vipassana were all part of a single path. Samatha and vipassana were used together to master jhana and then -- based on jhana -- were developed even further to give rise to the end of mental defilement and to bring release from suffering. This is a reading that finds support in other discourses as well.

There's a passage, for instance, describing three ways in which samatha and vipassana can work together to lead to the knowledge of Awakening: either samatha precedes vipassana, vipassana precedes samatha, or they develop in tandem (A.IV.170). The wording suggests an image of two oxen pulling a cart: one is placed before the other or they are yoked side-by-side. Another passage (A.IV.94) indicates that if samatha precedes vipassana -- or vipassana, samatha -- one's practice is in a state of imbalance and needs to be rectified. A meditator who has attained a measure of samatha, but no "vipassana into events based on heightened discernment (adhipañña-dhamma-vipassana)," should question a fellow meditator who has attained vipassana: "How should fabrications (sankhara) be regarded? How should they be investigated? How should they be viewed with insight?" and then develop vipassana in line with that person's instructions. The verbs in these questions -- "regarding," "investigating," "seeing" -- indicate

that there's more to the process of developing vipassana than a simple mindfulness technique. In fact, as we will see below, these verbs apply instead to a process of skillful questioning called "appropriate attention."

The opposite case -- a meditator endowed with a measure of vipassana into events based on heightened discernment, but no samatha -- should question someone who has attained samatha: "How should the mind be steadied? How should it be made to settle down? How should it be unified? How should it be concentrated?" and then follow that person's instructions so as to develop samatha. The verbs used here give the impression that "samatha" in this context means jhana, for they correspond to the verbal formula -- "the mind becomes steady, settles down, grows unified and concentrated" -- that the Pali discourses use repeatedly to describe the attainment of jhana. This impression is reinforced when we note that in every case where the discourses are explicit about the levels of concentration needed for insight to be liberating, those levels are the jhanas.

Once the meditator is endowed with both samatha and vipassana, he/she should "make an effort to establish those very same skillful qualities to a higher degree for the ending of the mental fermentations (asava -- sensual passion, states of being, views, and ignorance)." This corresponds to the path of samatha and vipassana developing in tandem. A passage in M.149 describes how this can happen. One knows and sees, as they actually are, the six sense media (the five senses plus the intellect), their objects, consciousness at each medium, contact at each medium, and whatever is experienced as pleasure, pain, or neither-pleasure-nor-pain based on that contact. One maintains this awareness in such a way as to stay uninfatuated by any of these things, unattached, unconfused, focused on their drawbacks, abandoning any craving for them: this would count as vipassana. At the same time -- abandoning physical and mental disturbances, torments, and distresses -- one experiences ease in body and mind: this would count as samatha. This practice not only develops samatha and vipassana in tandem, but also brings the 37 Wings to Awakening -- which include the attainment of jhana -- to the culmination of their development.

So the proper path is one in which vipassana and samatha are brought into balance, each supporting and acting as a check on the other. Vipassana helps keep tranquility from becoming stagnant and dull.

Samatha helps prevent the manifestations of aversion -- such as nausea, dizziness, disorientation, and even total blanking out -- that can occur when the mind is trapped against its will in the present moment.

From this description it's obvious that samatha and vipassana are not separate paths of practice, but instead are complementary ways of relating to the present moment: samatha provides a sense of ease in the present; vipassana, a clear-eyed view of events as they actually occur, in and of themselves. It's also obvious why the two qualities need to function together in mastering jhana. As the standard instructions on breath meditation indicate (M.118), such a mastery involves three things: gladdening, concentrating, and liberating the mind. Gladdening means finding a sense of refreshment and satisfaction in the present. Concentrating means keeping the mind focused on its object, while liberating means freeing the mind from the grosser factors making up a lower stage of concentration so as to attain a higher stage. The first two activities are functions of samatha, while the last is a function of vipassana. All three must function together. If, for example, there is concentration and gladdening, with no letting go, the mind wouldn't be able to refine its concentration at all. The factors that have to be abandoned in raising the mind from stage x to stage y belong to the set of factors that got the mind to x in the first place (A.IX.34). Without the ability clearly to see mental events in the present, there would be no way skillfully to release the mind from precisely the right factors that tie it to a lower state of concentration and act as disturbances to a higher one. If, on the other hand, there is simply a letting go of those factors, without an appreciation of or steadiness in the stillness that remains, the mind would drop out of jhana altogether. Thus samatha and vipassana must work together to bring the mind to right concentration in a masterful way.

The question arises: if vipassana functions in the mastery of jhana, and jhana is not exclusive to Buddhists, then what is Buddhist about vipassana? The answer is that vipassana per se is not exclusively Buddhist. What is distinctly

Buddhist is (1) the extent to which both samatha and vipassana are developed; and (2) the way they are developed -- i.e., the line of questioning used to foster them; and (3) the way they are combined with an arsenal of meditative tools to bring the mind to total release.

In M.73, the Buddha advises a monk who has mastered jhana to further develop samatha and vipassana so as to master six cognitive skills, the most important of them being that "through the ending of the mental fermentations, one remains in the fermentation-free release of awareness and release of discernment, having known and made them manifest for oneself right in the here and now." This is a description of the Buddhist goal. Some commentators have asserted that this release is totally a function of vipassana, but there are discourses that indicate otherwise.

Note that release is twofold: release of awareness and release of discernment. Release of awareness occurs when a meditator becomes totally dispassionate toward passion: this is the ultimate function of samatha. Release of discernment occurs when there is dispassion for ignorance: this is the ultimate function of vipassana (A.II.29-30). Thus both samatha and vipassana are involved in the twofold nature of this release. The Sabbasava Sutta (M.2) states that one's release can be "fermentation-free" only if one knows and sees in terms of "appropriate attention" (yoniso manasikara). As the discourse shows, appropriate attention means asking the proper questions about phenomena, regarding them not in terms of self/other or being/non-being, but in terms of the four noble truths. In other words, instead of asking "Do I exist? Don't I exist? What am I?" one asks about an experience, "Is this stress? The origination of stress? The cessation of stress? The path leading to the cessation of stress?" Because each of these categories entails a duty, the answer to these questions determines a course of action: stress should be comprehended, its origination abandoned, its cessation realized, and the path to its cessation developed.

Samatha and vipassana belong to the category of the path and so should be developed. To develop them, one must apply appropriate attention to the task of comprehending stress, which is comprised of the five aggregates of clinging -- clinging to physical form, feeling, perception, mental fabrications, and

consciousness. Applying appropriate attention to these aggregates means viewing them in terms of their drawbacks, as "inconstant, stressful, a disease, a cancer, an arrow, painful, an affliction, alien, a dissolution, an emptiness, not-self" (S.XXII.122). A list of questions, distinctive to the Buddha, aids in this approach: "Is this aggregate constant or inconstant?" "And is anything inconstant easeful or stressful?" "And is it fitting to regard what is inconstant, stressful, subject to change as: 'This is mine. This is my self. This is what I am'?" (S.XXII.59). These questions are applied to every instance of the five aggregates, whether "past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle, common or sublime, far or near." In other words, the meditator asks these questions of all experiences in the cosmos of the six sense media.

This line of questioning is part of a strategy leading to a level of knowledge called "knowing and seeing things as they actually are (yathabhuta-ñāna-dassana)," where things are understood in terms of a fivefold perspective: their arising, their passing away, their drawbacks, their allure, and the escape from them -- the escape, here, lying in dispassion.

Some commentators have suggested that, in practice, this fivefold perspective can be gained simply by focusing on the arising and passing away of these aggregates in the present moment; if one's focus is relentless enough, it will lead naturally to a knowledge of drawbacks, allure, and escape, sufficient for total release. The texts, however, don't support this reading, and practical experience would seem to back them up. As M.101 points out, individual meditators will discover that, in some cases, they can develop dispassion for a particular cause of stress simply by watching it with equanimity; but in other cases, they will need to make a conscious exertion to develop the dispassion that will provide an escape. The discourse is vague -- perhaps deliberately so -- as to which approach will work where. This is something each meditator must test for him or herself in practice.

The Sabbasava Sutta expands on this point by listing seven approaches to take in developing dispassion. Vipassana, as a quality of mind, is related to all seven, but most directly with the first: "seeing," i.e., seeing events in terms of the four noble truths and the duties appropriate to them. The remaining six approaches cover ways of carrying out those duties: restraining the mind

from focusing on sense data that would provoke unskillful states of mind; reflecting on the appropriate reasons for using the requisites of food, clothing, shelter, and medicine; tolerating painful sensations; avoiding obvious dangers and inappropriate companions; destroying thoughts of sensual desire, ill will, harmfulness, and other unskillful states; and developing the seven factors of awakening: mindfulness, analysis of qualities, persistence, rapture, serenity, concentration, and equanimity.

Each of these approaches covers a wide subset of approaches. Under "destroying," for instance, one may eliminate an unskillful mental state by replacing it with a skillful one, focusing on its drawbacks, turning one's attention away from it, relaxing the process of thought-fabrication that formed it, or suppressing it with the brute power of one's will (M.20). Many similar examples could be drawn from other discourses as well. The overall point is that the ways of the mind are varied and complex. Different fermentations can come bubbling up in different guises and respond to different approaches. One's skill as a meditator lies in mastering a variety of approaches and developing the sensitivity to know which approach will work best in which situation.

On a more basic level, however, one needs strong motivation to master these skills in the first place. Because appropriate attention requires abandoning dichotomies that are so basic to the thought patterns of all people -- "being/not being" and "me/not me" -- meditators need strong reasons for adopting it. This is why the Sabbasava Sutta insists that anyone developing appropriate attention must first must hold the noble ones (here meaning the Buddha and his awakened disciples) in high regard. In other words, one must see that those who have followed the path are truly exemplary. One must also be well-versed in their teaching and discipline. According to M.117, "being well-versed in their teaching" begins with having conviction in their teachings about karma and rebirth, which provide intellectual and emotional context for adopting the four noble truths as the basic categories of experience. Being well-versed in the discipline of the noble ones would include, in addition to observing the precepts, having some skill in the seven approaches mentioned above for abandoning the fermentations.

Without this sort of background, meditators might bring the wrong attitudes and questions to the practice of watching arising and passing away in the present moment. For instance, they might be looking for a "true self" and end up identifying -- consciously or unconsciously -- with the vast, open sense of awareness that embraces all change, from which it all seems to come and to which it all seems to return. Or they might long for a sense of connectedness with the vast interplay of the universe, convinced that -- as all things are changing -- any desire for changelessness is neurotic and life-denying. For people with agendas like these, the simple experience of events arising and passing away in the present won't lead to fivefold knowledge of things as they are. They'll resist recognizing that the ideas they hold to are a fermentation of views, or that the experiences of calm that seem to verify those ideas are simply a fermentation in the form of a state of being. As a result, they won't be willing to apply the four noble truths to those ideas and experiences. Only a person willing to see those fermentations as such, and convinced of the need to transcend them, will be in a position to apply the principles of appropriate attention to them and thus get beyond them.

So, to answer the question with which we began: Vipassana is not a meditation technique. It's a quality of mind -- the ability to see events clearly in the present moment. Although mindfulness is helpful in fostering vipassana, it's not enough for developing vipassana to the point of total release. Other techniques and approaches are needed as well. In particular, vipassana needs to be teamed with samatha -- the ability to settle the mind comfortably in the present -- so as to master the attainment of strong states of absorption, or jhana. Based on this mastery, samatha and vipassana are then applied to a skillful program of questioning, called appropriate attention, directed at all experience: exploring events not in terms of me/not me, or being/not being, but in terms of the four noble truths. The meditator pursues this program until it leads to a fivefold understanding of all events: in terms of their arising, their passing away, their drawbacks, their allure, and the escape from them. Only then can the mind taste release.

This program for developing vipassana and samatha, in turn, needs the support of many other attitudes, mental qualities, and techniques of practice. This was why the Buddha taught it as

part of a still larger program, including respect for the noble ones, mastery of all seven approaches for abandoning the mental fermentations, and all eight factors of the noble path. To take a reductionist approach to the practice can produce only reduced results, for meditation is a skill like carpentry, requiring a mastery of many tools in response to many different needs. To limit oneself to only one approach in meditation would be like trying to build a house when one's motivation is uncertain and one's tool box contains nothing but hammers.

Abbreviations: A = Anguttara Nikaya; M = Majjhima Nikaya; S = Samyutta Nikaya

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<http://world.std.com/~metta/lib/modern/onetool.html>

Retreat with Mary Jo Meadow at Guelph Centre for Spirituality March 13, 1999. Report by Ani Bennet

Those Buddhists who hail from a Catholic background will appreciate Mary Jo's cross-pollination of Catholic contemplative traditions from the Carmelite saints, with Mahasi style vipassana and metta practices. Those who seek a clear, concise teacher who prefers a traditional teaching style, only slightly adapted for lay practice in the west, will also appreciate her.

Dr. Mary Jo Meadow is a trained teacher of Vipassana meditation who has studied with Joseph Goldstein at the Insight Meditation Society, Barre, Massachusetts, and with Sayadaw U Pandita of Burma. She has meditated for 35 years in the Christian, Hindu yogic and Theravadan Buddhist tradition, and has spent three or more months a year in intensive Vipassana practice for the past ten years. She is vowed to the precepts of the nuns in the Theravadan Buddhist tradition, as well as being a lay associate of the Discalced Carmelites, a Roman Catholic contemplative order.

Dr. Meadow is a licensed clinical psychologist and a recently retired professor of psychology and religious studies at University of Mankato Minnesota. Past president of the American Psychological Association's divisions on the Psychology of Religion, and Humanistic Psychology, she is the author of several books including: Purifying the Heart: Buddhist Insight

Meditation for Christians; and Gentling the Heart: Buddhist Loving-Kindness Practice for Christians. These works outline meditation instructions for vipassana and metta meditation respectively. Through a Glass Darkly is a further scholarly work outlining her view of the Psychology of faith.

A pre-retreat workshop on the psychology of meditation briefly outlined Dr. Meadow's analysis of the development of meditation practice over time, in the various concentrative and awareness based traditions. Anchored in her own experience, Dr. Meadow outlined the different stages attained in the concentrative traditions, principally mantra meditations and prayer forms like those of St. Teresa of Avila, to those attained in awareness based practices and prayer forms like those of St. John of the Cross. Stressing that each method works and is viable within its traditional framework, and that the classical forms in each "school" of practice are well-proven over many centuries, she urged practitioners of more modern methods not to let go of their tool, as is often suggested in the later stages of TM, or centering prayer types of meditation. These newer forms have not been proven to take the practitioner to the levels of more classically formed methods. And in fact, often leave the practitioner hanging, without guidance at a point where real progress could in fact be made.

The five day retreat teaching unfolded in a pragmatic and easy to follow pattern. As a student of Sayadaw U Pandita, Dr. Meadow taught the "mental noting" method with various objects of attention. Each day commenced formally at 6 am., with alternating sitting, walking meditation, and well-organized dharma talks. Each day punctually at noon, the seventy or more practitioners sat for a brief instruction in metta, and practiced metta together for 30 minutes. Strongly encouraging practitioners to bring attention to every daily action, from personal hygiene to "going to sleep with metta" Dr. Meadow brought out the value of this rigorous effort. Practitioners with more experience were encouraged to sit into the night hours, if their practice drew them to do so. Without belittling the practice level most were at, she underlined the value of extended sittings with stories from her long retreats with the Burmese master U Pandita. He refused to see anyone individually who was sleeping more than four hours a night.

Most of the instruction and theory given were familiar to those who had practiced vipassana before, and accessible to those who were new to the practice. The method was applied, and attention encouraged in very traditional, and familiar ways. Early in the retreat talks focussed on the four noble truths, the precepts and the noble eightfold path. Later talks moved into areas of concern for continuing practice on one's own after the retreat, and focussed on practical and theoretical questions from the students.

Beginning practice outside of a monastic situation where ongoing contact with a meditation master is possible, many of us find our practice early on beset by difficulties which could be remedied simply by a brief word with a teacher. Dr. Meadow has two basic solutions to this problem. One is simply offering an outline of some of the hindrances, and discussing practical methods of combating them. The other is offering her students the option of follow-up contact by email or telephone, where guidance in one's practice is required.

As a teacher Dr. Meadow values a deep engagement of heart, body, and mind. She honours the tradition and is a very gifted and experienced teacher. Her organized approach to the presentation and development of themes over the five days supported a deepening appreciation of the "why's" of the practice she was teaching. She conducted the retreat with humility and a transparency of process which demystified the teaching, and kept the focus on the dharma, rather than on the teacher.

And she did not shy away from difficult questions: at one point a meditator questioned whether enlightenment could be attained by a householder with numerous family and professional responsibilities. That this issue is "very disputed whether realized mind can be cultivated outside of intensive retreat settings" was her direct response. She did not shy away from the value for practice of renunciation. With attention and kindness, the value of simplifying one's life, and the necessity of devoting as much time as one's duties and obligations allowed to the practice was pointed out. In a similar style, the keeping of noble silence and "custody of the eyes" was made an explicit commitment of the retreat, yet knowing the extroverted bias of North American society, this was iterated in a

way which gently revealed the true value of these practices to the individual, as well as to the group. Thus, she was able to balance instruction for disciplined practice with understanding and acceptance of the conditioning and commitments of her students, and offer an encouraging view of the worth of practice outside of the monastic setting. She disclosed that she herself waited for her first three month retreat until her last child had left home.

The retreat was very successful, and by the end of the five days plans were underway for a further series of retreats probably in March and October of the next two years. Because of the large number of Christian identified meditators at the retreat, and the interest in the connections Dr. Meadow makes between the Christian mysticism of St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Avila, one of these will likely be the "Silence & Awareness" retreat offered by the Missouri based Resources for Spirituality, which Dr. Meadow and her Carmelite colleagues operate. This format offers the vipassana practice method, but talks reflect more the interplay of Christian and Buddhist theory. Also if sufficient interest is expressed, a dedicated metta retreat will be offered.

Dr. Meadow offered advice on developing practice, and maintaining one's zeal after the retreat. In particular, a format which has proven fruitful in her Minnesota sangha, was the incorporation of a Wednesday night sutta study & sitting to afford additional opportunity to meet and to practice together. Recommended for such a group to start is the very practical Wisdom Publications text in English by Sayadaw U Pandita In This Very Life.

Anyone interested in a Wednesday evening sutta study & sitting group is invited to call Ani Arnott, at 613-820-0424. May all beings be happy.

OBS MONTHLY DAY OF MINDFULNESS

Each month, MEMBERS AND FRIENDS OF Ottawa Buddhsit Society observe a Day of Mindfulness on a Saturday on or before a full moon to commemorate Prince Siddhartha Gautama's enlightenment under a full moon.

The program begins at 8:00 AM and finishes at 3:30 PM. For more information call 730-2417 or write to amink@cyberus.ca

There is a vegetarian potluck lunch. For meal coordination call Udula at 825-9370.

Members can borrow books and the tapes from our small collection.

The Ottawa Buddhist Society encourages members and friends of the Society to actively participate in the Day of Mindfulness. Let me know if you would like to give a short talk, do a reading, or share some thoughts with others.

Monthly Days of Mindfulness for 1999.
January 23; February 20; March 27; April 24;
May 22; June 26, July 24; August 21; September 25; October 23; November 20; December 18.

Ajahn Viradhammos February 99 Retreat
The donations amounted to \$1873. This sum has been sent to Amaravati. Thanks to all for the generosity. Tax receipts for donors will be sent at the end of the year.

Ajahn Vuradhammo will be in Ottawa in the beginning of November.

Letter from Ajahn Viradhammo
Dear Amin,
Greetings from Amaravati. We are having a cool but sunny, colourful spring. The beauty of this time is stunning and unlike Canada the spring season stretches out over many months.

I have considered where to do my self-retreat and I think a monastery is the best option. The people in New Zealand have been very inviting so I shall go there in late December. I shall be visiting Ottawa in the beginning of November but I'm still some way off from fixing the dates.

Please convey my thanks to all those who have expressed the willingness and generosity in supporting me.

Here at Amaravati we are preparing for the Temple ceremony which is not so far away.

That's all that comes to mind for now.

With metta,

Ajahn Viradhammo

VESAK DAY OF MINDFULNESS,
SATURDAY MAY 22

Bhante Jagaradhammo of Bhavana Center in West Virginia will be with us for about a week to celebrate Vesak which we will be observing on May 22nd. He will be guiding the sittings and giving Dhamma talks for the Vesak Day of Mindfulness. He will also give public talks in the evenings. More info as it become available

A reminder that the Ottawa Buddhist Society has organised a NINE DAY RETREAT (July 2-July 11) at McSkimming Outdoor Education Center near Ottawa with AJAHN SONA OF BIRKEN FORERST MONASTERY in British Columbia. Ajahn Sona was trained at the Bhavana Center in West Virginia and also at Ajahn Cha's Monastery in North East Thailand.

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Vipassana Retreat in the Burmese Tradition
Dates: June 29- July 8th. For more information call sister Khemanandi at (705) 689-5642

Retreat program at Maple Village (Quebec)

1. 4-day retreat with Dr. Chan Hoi (Nguyen Tan Hong) and the Dharmacaryas of the Village: from 24 to 28 June 1999, cost : \$150 (including housing and meals)
2. 4-day retreat with Sister Annabel (assisted by the Dharmacaryas of the Village) : from 10 to 14 October 1999, cost : \$150 (including housing and meals)(Whatever official language that will be used, there will be simultaneous translation into English or French, attendees are also requested to be at the Village for the orientation session on June 24th and October 10th at 19:30

hrs) Please make your pre-registration directly with Maple Village : 9089 Richmond, Brossard, Quebec, J4X 2S1. Tel : (450) 591-8726, Fax : (450) 466-8958, if you are interested to attend. You can also contact Chan Huy by email for more information : chanhuy@prisco.net

Retreat with Norman Feldman. The retreat will be held July 23 to 28, 1999 at MacSkimming Outdoor Education Centre 30 minutes east of Ottawa. The cost for the five days is \$300.00 if paid by June 1. After that the cost is \$330.00. Payment to the teacher is extra and paid at the end of the retreat. A deposit of \$120.00 will reserve a place. For information and a registration form call Melodie Bengier at 730-5929 or email at melodie.bengier@cyberus.ca.

Three Day Retreat on Intimacy With Life with Dr Tara Brach and Beverley Tates from July 22 to July 25 at Ecology Retreat Center, Hockley Valley. For more info call (416) 487-2943

Other Events, Groups, and News

The Sangha Council of Ontario is organising a day of buddhist celebration for canadfa and World Peace 1999 on June 5th at the Toronto City Hall.

For more info contact The Westend Buddhist Center, tel/fax: (905) 891-8412. Please do not call/fax them during their daily meditation times which are: 7:00-8:00 AM, 7:00-8:00 PM and lunch time which is 11:00AM-12:00PM

Name of Group: Theravada Buddhist Community of Toronto

Type of Group: Theravada

Teacher: Ajahn Viradhammo and Others
Language: English

Activities: At The Healing Arts Centre, 717 Bloor Street West at the Christie subway station) include meditation sittings on Sunday mornings from 10 to 12 and a meditation/study group to which people commit to meeting Monday evenings from 7:30 to 9:30 for six week periods. We also organize weekend and nine day retreats, primarily with Ajahn Viradhammo, Abbot of The Amaravati Buddhist Monastery in England. Ajahn Viradhammo is a Canadian Buddhist monk, ordained in 1974 in the forest monastery tradition of Ajahn Chah, a renowned meditation master from north-east Thailand.

Contact Person: Wendy Walker through our Telephone number (416) 462-4289

Tel: (416) 462-4289

Secretary: Sue Freypon: sfreypon@uoguelph.ca

Mailing Address: TBC Secretary: Sue Frepons,
82 Blackthorn Avenue, Toronto ON M6N 3H5

Tu-An Pagoda Meditation Group

The Tu-An pagoda meditation group was founded in the summer of 1994 to promote the practice of both the Pure Land School (Tinh Do Tong) and the Mahayana Buddhism (Thien Tong).

We meet at 4:00PM every on Sundays. Each meditation session lasts about one hour and a half. We start with sitting meditation (for about half an hour) and complete the session with a walking meditation ('kinh-in'). The second part of the meeting session is devoted usually to the study of Buddhist teachings. This study session takes

different forms: One time we listened to Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh's Dharma talk on cassette tape, another time we discussed about the talk (Dharma discussions). Once every three months, we recited the 5 Buddhist precepts. From time to time, we recited the sutras or we evoked the Bodhisattvas' names (an example is given below). The sutras we often use comprise the Prajnaparamita Sutra, the Discourse on Love and the Discourse on Happiness. Recently, we started sharing our practice while studying the book 'the Heart of the Buddha's Teaching' written by Thây Nhat Hanh (published by Parallax Press, California).

Our members also involved in organizing retreats and days of mindfulness. We are grateful to the following monks and nuns for their teaching and guidance in the practice: Ajahn Viradhammo (from Amaravati, England), Thay Giac Thanh (Plum Village, France), Thay Tri Sieu (France), Sister Annabel Laity (Green Mountain Dharma Center, Vermont, USA) and Sister Chan Giai Nghiem (Plum Village, France).

From the Dhammapada.

Mind precedes its objects. They are mind-governed and mind-made. To speak or act with a defiled mind is to draw pain after oneself, like a wheel behind the feet of the animal drawing it.

Mind precedes its objects. They are mind-governed and mind-made. To speak or act with a peaceful mind, is to draw happiness after oneself, like an inseparable shadow.

I have been insulted! I have been hurt! I have been beaten! I have been robbed! Anger does not cease in those who harbour this sort of thought.

I have been insulted! I have been hurt! I have been beaten! I have been robbed! Anger ceases in those who do not harbour this sort of thought.

Occasions of hatred are certainly never settled by hatred. They are settled by freedom from hatred. This is the eternal law.



**C/o 84B Fulton Avenue, Ottawa, Ont K1S 4Y8, (613) 730-2417, amink@cyberus.ca
OTTAWA BUDDHIST SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP**

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 enrol as a member of the Ottawa Buddhist Society.

PLEASE PRINT

Name Last: _____ First: _____ Tel: _____

Address: _____

_____ eMail: _____

Signature: _____ Date _____

Annual Dues: Single: \$25; Family: \$50 Associate Member: \$12; Student: free

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

Mail this with your payment to the Treasurer Ottawa Buddhsit Society, 11 Longboat Ct., Kanata, Ont. K2K 2T3. For more information about the Society contact Amin at amink@cyberus.ca or (613) 730-2417, or Anoma at (613) 226-8160.

VOLUNTEERS FOR OTTAWA BUDDHIST SOCIETY.

Ottawa Buddhist Society is looking for volunteers to help with the following:

Accounting; Taxation; Greeting at events; Graphic Design; Art; Preparing Poster Translation (English <--> French and other languages); Organising Social Events ; Library; Charitable projects; Others

I would like to be responsible for the following activities/projects:



C/o 84B Fulton Avenue, Ottawa, Ont K1S 4Y8, (613) 730-2417, amink@cyberus.ca

Nine Day Retreat with Ajahn Sona
July 2nd-11th 1999
McSkimming Outdoor Education Center

WHEN: 8:00PM July 2nd - 4:00 PM July 11
ARRIVAL TIME: 6:00PM-7:30PM, July 2nd
WHERE: Mcskimming Outdoor Education Center, 2685 Wilhaven Rd. Tel: 833-0191. Take HiWay 417 east and then HiWay 17 East. About 4.5 KM after Cumberland exit (26KM East of 417/17 junction) turn right on Canaan Rd; then right on Milhaven Rd.
COST: C\$300, all inclusive, for full 9 day retreat; \$100 for the first weekend of the retreat if space is available.
DEADLINE: June 15th
REFUND: Full refund if cancellation received before June 15th, 50% if between June 15th and June 22nd, and no refund after June 22nd.
MORE INFO: Hoa at 770-7888; Anoma at 226-8160
TO REGISTER: Fill in the form and mail with your full payment to Hoa at 7 Wright St, Hull, QCJ8Y 3J6. Make all checks payable to the Ottawa Buddhist Society.
PRIORITY: There are a limited number of spaces available; first priority will be given to Ottawa Buddhist Society members and then to those who want to attend the full retreat.
DONATION TO THE MONK: The registration fee covers cost of accommodation, food, and transportation for the monk. In keeping with the ancient Buddhist tradition, the teachings and meditation instructions are given by the monk free of charge. The monk and the monastery are supported by donations. You may make a donation to the monk through the Ottawa Buddhist Society and at the end of the year you will receive a tax receipt.
WHAT TO BRING: sleeping bag, sheet and blanket, pillow, ear plugs, toiletries, towels, enough clothes for 9 days, insect repellent, flashlight, walking shoes, meditation cushion and a mat to put your cushion on .
VOLUNTEERING: You are expected to sign up to help with various tasks during the retreat.
NOBLE SILENCE: The retreat begins at 8:00 PM on Friday July 2nd and ends at 4:00 PM on Sunday July 11th. For the duration of the retreat, please observe noble silence, the Eight Precepts, and all house rules.
MEALS: Breakfast and lunch - both vegetarian - are the two main meals; in the evening there will be tea, juice, and fruits.
HOUSING: Women can choose to be in a dorm for 21 or in a cabin for 7. The cabins do not have bathrooms or power. Men will be housed in cabins.

AJAHN SONA'S BIOGRAPHY: Born in 1954, Ven. Sona's background as a lay person is in classical guitar performance (U. if Toronto). Having left behind worldly lifehe embarked on a spiritual journey as a lay hermit for about five years and subsequently ordained as a Theravadin monk in West Virginia, U.S.A.

He further trained at monasteries like Wat Pah Nanachat and Wat Keuhn in North-East Thailand for three years.

Upon his return to Canada in 1994 he established the Birken Forest Monastery near Pemberton, B.C. Ven. Sona is one of the pioneers in introducing the Theravadin forest monastic tradition in Canada. (This is the same tradition that Ajahn Viradhammo follows) Well experienced in leading meditation retreats and lecturing on Buddhist meditation retreats and practice in Canada and abroad, Ven. Sona's teachings combine tried-and-true Buddhist wisdom with modern common sense. Ven. Sona is the abbot of the Birken Forest Monastery at it's new location in Princeton, B.C.

Application to attend Ajahn Sona's Retreat

Name:
Last _____
First _____
Address: _____

Tel:
Home _____
Office _____
email: _____

PREFERRED HOUSING: Dorm _____ Cabin _____

ARE YOU VEGAN? YES _____ No _____
I would like to attend the full retreat. Check for \$300 is enclosed. _____

I would like to attend only the first weekend of the retreat. Check for \$100 is enclosed _____

Mail this with your payment to Hoa Nguyen, 7 Wright St, Hull, QC J8Y 3J6. Make all checks payable to the Ottawa Buddhist Society