

Insight Journal Fall 2005

An Organic Spirituality
Editor's Essay

It's About How to Live
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The Buddha Did Not Teach Buddhism
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Program Information

A Face So Calm
Pali Poetry



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Insight involves an intuition of mind and heart that takes us beyond knowledge toward wisdom. It has to do with deeply understanding the nature of things, rather than knowing a lot about them.

In the Buddhist tradition wisdom is nurtured by the deep investigation of experience. This involves the careful integration of both study and practice—the study of Buddha’s teachings (Dhamma), coupled with the practice of meditation.

This journal is dedicated to exploring some of the insights that such a balanced inquiry uncovers about ourselves, our world, and our fellow beings. Welcome to the discussion.



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An Organic Spirituality

We are accustomed in the West to think of spiritual matters as having to do with placing ourselves in relationship with something greater than ourselves, something “other,” and something “out there.” At best it is something beautiful, wise, and willing to love us dearly. At worst it is powerful, fearful, and capable of judging us harshly. Some come to know of it through texts of revelation, the teaching of prophets, or the edifices of tradition built upon these foundations. Others intuit it in nature, perceive it in states of non-ordinary experience, or learn of it from wise and trusted elders. In its numerous diverse shapes and forms, this model of the “sacred other” forms the dominant religious paradigm for the Western world.

In ancient India, along the Indus and Ganges river systems, a very different approach to spirituality was discovered and practiced. It had to do with turning inward rather than outward, with understanding and purifying oneself rather than cultivating a relationship with another, and with meditation and asceticism rather than with prayer and ritual. Remnants of this alternative, more organic, approach to spirituality can still be found in the Yogic, Jain, Buddhist and Hindu traditions, but they lie for the most part hidden under layers of both ancient and modern Western influence.

Long before the invasion of Alexander, Aryan migration over the Khyber Pass and settlement of the river valleys displaced the indigenous culture and imposed upon the region a Western brand of religion involving hereditary priests, sacred revealed truth, and costly ritual communication with masculine sky gods. The introspective tradition went underground and to the fringes of the Vedic world, from where it erupted into the mainstream culture from time to time over the ensuing centuries. One such infiltration was when the Upanishads, steeped in the yogic influence of its forest practitioners, was admitted into the Hindu fold as an acceptable innovation of Vedic tradition.

A more significant incursion occurred when the Buddha proclaimed his Dharma. From the depths of his personal understanding, gained by arduous ascetic meditation in the wilderness and the radical purification of his mind, the Buddha's teaching burst onto the scene and challenged the orthodoxy to the core. By the time of King Ashoka it looked capable of supplanting the Brahmanical tradition entirely, but with the collapse of his empire and the turmoil of recurring waves of invasion, Hinduism was gradually able to regain its dominant position on the Indian spiritual landscape. Buddhism was not only marginalized, but was slowly recast more in line with the conventional religious paradigm and absorbed into the mainstream. Buddha is today seen in India as the tenth incarnation of Vishnu, sent to earth to teach good Hindus to cease animal sacrifice and to become vegetarians. Even Buddhism today is commonly expressed in the Brahmanical language of primordial perfection, non-dual awareness, and inherently awakened inner nature.

What are the key features of this more ancient, more organic spirituality taught by the Buddha in his lifetime? To begin with, it is radically experiential. What do you see and feel and touch and know, *for yourself*, when you attend to the immediacy of the present moment with steady and focused awareness? The outward direction is fraught with illusion, projected from the mysterious depths of the psyche. According to the sages of the river valleys, only by exploring the inner landscape, the nuances and subtle textures of lived experience, can useful and authentic wisdom be discovered.

Fearless and honest introspection will soon reveal the core defects of the human condition; this is the noble truth of suffering. The mind and body are riddled with stumbling blocks, choke points, nodes of tension, knots of pain, and a veritable fountainhead of selfish, hurtful and deluded psychological stuff. The mind's capacity for awareness, the “knowing” that arises and passes away, drop by drop in the stream of consciousness, is constantly hindered, fettered, intoxicated and polluted by such internal defilements. The enterprise of organic spirituality is to untangle these tangles, to untie these knots, to unbind the mind—moment by moment, breath by breath—from the imprisoning net of unwholesome and unhealthy manifestations. The reward for a life of careful inner cultivation is the liberation of the mind through wisdom—a remarkable transformation of the mind that awakens it to its full potential of awareness without obstruction or limitation.

Volumes could be written about the details of this science of liberation, about its discoveries of impermanence, selflessness and suffering, its analysis of the psycho-physical organism into sense spheres, aggregates, and elements, the profound workings of interdependent origination and cessation, or about the extraordinary territory mapped out by the exploration of inner states. But the pivotal discovery of this ancient spirituality is that the world of human experience is a virtual world, constructed each moment by every individual mind and body to patterns of human invention and instinct. Mind and body are natural expressions of a natural world. Their suffering is natural; their liberation from suffering is natural. The “sacred other” is as much a construction as are notions of “permanence,” “selfhood,” and “beauty.” It's not that such things “don't exist” or cannot be the source of considerable meaningfulness. It's just that they are not “out there” in the ways the Indo-European religious reflex takes for granted. Rather, they are projected by the same inner mechanism that orders all other human constructions: the workings of desire.

It's not surprising that this radical alternative to the dominant paradigm was misunderstood by the Buddha's Brahmanical contemporaries, misrepresented for centuries by their ancestors, and continues to be overlooked by modern heirs of the Indo-European spiritual tradition. Yet it continues to beckon, quietly offering its compelling perspective on the human condition to those willing to look inward rather than outward and upward.

—Andrew Olendzki



We aren't real flashy. We sit a lot.

It's About How to Live

An interview with
Roshi Pat Enkyo O'Hara

Roshi Pat Enkyo O'Hara is the abbot of the Village Zendo in Manhattan. She is a Soto Zen Priest and certified Zen Teacher in Maezumi Roshi's White Plum lineage. She received priest ordination from Maezumi Roshi and Dharma Transmission from Bernie Tetsugen Glassman Roshi. She holds a Ph.D. in Media Ecology, and taught at NYU for twenty years.

One usually thinks of a Zen temple as tucked away peacefully in some fold of the misty mountains. I'm guessing this is not quite the case with you in Manhattan.

Precisely not! It reminds me of when a Zen teacher was asked how to enter the Buddha way, and he said, "Do you hear the sound of that stream? Enter there." Our *zendo*, plunked down right on Broadway, a few dozen blocks from the old World Trade Center, enters the buddha way through the sounds of sirens, church bells, the rumble of loading and unloading products and garbage. We occupy an old loft space on a high floor, and morning meditation is filled with sunlight from the east, a view of the eastern Manhattan skyline, and the sounds of the city waking up.

Finding quiet within this context definitely strengthens practice. We learn to drop our constant craving and aversion, to be present to what is—without reactivity. Then, when we go downstairs and reenter the

streets, there's plenty of opportunity to actualize compassion in every moment.

Why did you decide to establish a zendo where and when you did?

Back in 1985, I was still teaching at NYU, with family responsibilities—a college-age son and an aging mother—and it seemed expedient to begin just where my life was. Initially, we were simply a sitting group, practicing in my apartment. Years passed, and we grew organically, in size and intention. As we grew, we just naturally evolved to meet the needs of where we are.

Are there any special challenges to operating in such an urban environment?

Perhaps the main challenge is to keep our awareness that every annoyance and irritation that we may attribute to our environment can be a skillful means for our practice. I think that

ideally, in a rural environment, the natural world contains us, helps us to see our place in the arising and falling of each moment. Of course, if our mind is troubled, the rural environment can appear threatening, sad, or even anger-provoking! In an urban context, the same is true, the sounds and sights tend to be foreign, grating, industrial, and yet the mind can either make music and hear the spaces between or it can create suffering.

This fall, when I returned to the city from our annual five-week retreat in the country, the first thing I noticed was the marvelous beauty of the faces of the people walking down the street. They were like flowers, each one unique, so many colors and sizes, like a summer meadow.

How did you first get involved in Zen practice?

For me, it was the arts. As a young woman I was drawn to the spontaneity and freedom of Chinese

and Japanese calligraphy, Korean ceramics, and the poetry of the Zen tradition. Studying in Berkeley, I had access to wonderful collections of Asian art and literature. Going a little deeper, I discovered the Zen principles that gave rise to these forms, and I was hooked.

Who comes to your center, and why?

I think people come because they are seeking themselves, seeking the meaning of their lives. A young man may come in order to find what he wants to do with his life. And older woman might want to find a way to make peace with herself before she dies. Of course, it is hard to make generalizations of who comes here. We have a good distribution of age, class, and sexuality. We could do better in terms of race and we are looking at that. There is a preponderance of artists, healers (therapists, health professionals, chaplains), and teachers. We aren't real flashy. We sit a lot. We study *koans*, *sutras* and *sastras*.

Are you training people to be leaders in your tradition?

Oh yes. As I get older, leadership training becomes more urgent for me. Through the years I have seen the astonishing workings of the dharma in people's lives. It seems to me that it is critical to pass on the teachings and teaching skills that I have absorbed from my excellent teachers, and then let it out.

What does such training involve?

Trainees are encouraged to do as many of our residential retreats as possible, to study the dharma

independently, and to do deep inquiry into their motivation. As a whole community, we do ongoing sutra and great writings study. We take a long time to develop teachers in our tradition. Many years. During that time, a Zen student usually has a private interview with me each week, and on retreat, each day. In these interviews we work on koans (old stories that point to vital aspects of the dharma) or we may discuss issues in the person's life, or we may focus on the precepts. After a few years, the training includes giving meditation instruction to others, giving dharma talks, and being involved in the overall governance of the group. Then, they begin to give private interviews under my supervision. Some are at that stage now. Soon I will be giving final, independent teaching status to the first group.

Every annoyance can
be skillful means for
our practice.

What role are your trainees likely to play in their communities?

It depends on the situation. For example, one trainee heads an affiliate center, so she serves as an instructor, a counselor, and a priest. Another leads a group at Sing-Sing prison. He offers instruction, services, and interviews. Other trainees are more involved with governance, chaplaincy, or center operations. A potter's offering is very different from a scholar's or a therapist's. The trick is to give each trainee enough space to develop their own unique teaching capabilities, and yet continue to offer them the support and structure of what I have inherited from my teachers and my life experience.

What would you say is the most valuable thing the perspective of Buddhist practice offers to, for example, a New Yorker fully engaged with a demanding set of duties and responsibilities?

Well, it's about how to live. How to find the space to be thoroughly aware in the midst of the clamor of the world around us. How not to harm. Lately, I have been focusing on that subtle duct that allows us to change our perspective moment to moment from the subjective "what I am doing right now is of utmost importance and use to the world" to the inter-relational "my actions are part of the ongoing flow of the world." The latter implies that it is not "I" alone that am acting, but "I" am acting along with the world. Dogen put it so well when he said in the Genjo Koan,

To carry the self forward and realize the ten thousand dharmas is delusion.

That the ten thousand dharmas advance and realize the self is enlightenment.

To always try to keep that subtle distinction in our heart-minds as we breathe through the day of emails, cell phones, subway rides, horns honking, family and relationship demands—that would be of great value.

There seems to be such misinformation, even caricature, of Zen in the popular mind. Is there any simple way of articulating Zen to a general public?

Well, I'm not a purist. My heart teacher, Maezumi Roshi, would smile and say, "Fish can't live in too pure water." As I mentioned before, my own entry into practice came through the arts, compelling me to

see that any entry, even a product ad for “zen furniture,” can be of use if it brings someone to practice. If it does not, well, so what, what is harmed? After all, “Delusions are inexhaustible.”

As for a simple way to articulate Zen? Most of the Zen literature is about just that, about finding expedient means to break through the dreams and screens of our minds. We build up an idea of what Zen is, and we thereby separate from it, creating a “Zen” that is outside of our own minds, of our own experience. How do I convey the incredible truth resident in the dharma without reifying it, without turning it into an idea that is separate from my life right now?

Each day, each moment, there arises an opportunity to express it, by actualizing my insight, or to kill it by turning it into an idea, a dream. One way, traditionally, has been to resort to direct, live interaction, to focus on its living-in-this-moment truth that is always right here and always changing. Thus, all the shouts and laughter. Right now, I suggest that Zen is being completely, thoroughly yourself, it is meeting yourself, and meeting what you may think is outside yourself, illapsing into that space where these two merge together. By the way, I love the word illapse. It means to slip in, to gently permeate. I think it gives the sense of the subtlety of the process.

How to articulate Zen?

Each moment there arises an opportunity to express it...or to kill it.

You have led a few study retreats at BCBS using the texts of Dogen. Is this a Zen thinker of particular interest to you or your tradition?

When I read Dogen, I find it hard to believe that he wrote in the years 1230-1250, in an early Japanese syllabary. He seems so contemporary. He uses words to express a truth about the dharma, then to extrapolate, then to bend the meaning, then again to turn it upside down, to finally exhaust and renew it! Dogen never seems to let us hold on to anything. He is constantly deconstructing our notions, in the service of having us face the overwhelming subtlety and depth of the dharma. I find this exciting and I always learn something new when I engage Dogen. He is amazing. We are fortunate to have some wonderful translators who offer his teachings to us. He is also the called the founder of Japanese Soto Zen, though I doubt he thought of such a thing.

You are part of a pivotal generation in the process of transmission of Zen from east to west. Would you say that we are “getting it?”

Well, the way “it” is expressed continually changes. Yet, there is a continuity. So often we talk about the spatial transmission as in “from East to West,” but actually we also need to look at the temporal aspect, at how Zen has changed through



I always learn something new when I engage Dogen.

time in every country. There are huge differences between 9th century Zen and 21st century Zen! What came to us here is really 19th-20th century Zen from 19th-20th century China, Japan and Korea. So already, because of colonialism, capitalism, and all the -isms of the past two centuries, that Zen that was transmitted was definitely different from Bodhidharma’s or the Sixth Patriarch’s.

In ancient China, they used the image of the veins in a polished gem to express the principle that continues, no matter how the gem is fashioned. I look at my transmission teacher, Roshi Bernie Glassman, as an example of the genuine dharma expressed as social action and spontaneous expression. Thus, right now, I see the Zen that is being transmitted here as authentic and true, and just as wild and interesting as in the old days.

Bonus Question: Why did Bodhidharma come from the West?

HA! Geographics! Look at the globe!

THE *BUDDHA* DID NOT TEACH *BUDDHISM*

Paul Fleischman

*This presentation was
made at the BCBS
Forum "Buddhist
Responses to Violence," on
September 11th, 2005.*

The verbal component of the Buddha's teaching is preserved in an ancient Indian vernacular known as Pali, which was the colloquial, street Sanskrit of the era around 600 BCE. Although particular components of the Pali texts can be questionable as to whether they truly represent the Teaching of the Buddha, the Pali Canon as a whole presents a unique implosion into the human condition of a coherent, well articulated, original, specific, generally self-consistent realization, which constitutes the Dhamma, or the Teaching of the Buddha. The word Buddhism (or any equivalent) is not found in this exposition. The Buddha explicitly rejected phrasings like "Buddhism" which imply an "ism," or a philosophical stance or position or viewpoint. The Buddha emphasized that he was not expounding an opinion but a Path, that is, a way of life, based on values and actions that lead to a holistic apperception, an experience, a realization.

The Dhamma, as taught by the Buddha, is a Path that leads to the cessation of suffering through a lifetime effort to gain insight into essential truths about the human condition. These truths are

uniquely codified in the Dhamma as the fourfold truth, the eightfold path and the twelve-fold chain of dependent origination. The goal and culmination of the efforts and discoveries which are made by people who put the Path into action is release from suffering, which derives from a relinquishment of clinging, which happens when there is a dissolution of the idea of a permanent, unchanging, eternal self within either the individual or within the universe. All the steps that lead to the end of suffering derive from a meditation-based realization of atomic and molecular change at the nexus of one's own body, the material world, and its constituents. The Dhamma in practice catalyzes a personal experience of the ultimate scientific reality that everything we are, see, think and feel is changing, impermanent and impersonal. Nibbana, which is not part of any self, god, or material universe, and which transcends any hate, fear, delusion, "ism" or viewpoint, is realized and entered via this path of Dhamma. Nibbana means freedom from ignorance and its attendant rebirth and suffering.

This teaching has embedded itself in the human community across time

and cultures because it appeals to our common hope of freedom from suffering and because, when practiced with ample commitment, time, and discipline, it is seen to be logical, workable, and appealing to people of diverse communities and eras.

*Do what helps others.
Refrain from harming others.
Transcend your own ignorance,
clinging, hate, fear, and delusion.
This and only this is the
dispensation of all the Buddhas.*

Those who wish to recast the Buddha as a Gandhian pacifist or as a liberal Democrat will be sorely disappointed.

An important feature of the Dhamma, as the Buddha unveils it, is its empirical nature. The Dhamma is not the Buddha's belief or viewpoint or religion or philosophy. The Dhamma is discovered by the Buddha in the same way that gravity was discovered by Newton or natural selection was discovered by Darwin. The Dhamma exists, and those who discover or rediscover and expound it, within the human community, are known as Buddha.

The focus of the path on the eradication of ignorant belief in an eternal self, on the realization of ubiquitous change in all material things, and on attaining Nibbana, gives the Path a decontextualized and abiding relevance. There is no god, holy land, black book, or ritual to bind Dhamma to any one time, place or group. If you prefer the phrasing, you could say that the Buddha made certain to abstract his teaching from his own historical and cultural context. He wanted his listeners to understand that, like other factual discoveries about nature, the Dhamma is valid across race, gender, class, and context.

But when the Buddha's words were spoken and then committed to memory by devoted listeners—for this is the way the Pali Canon was created, in an era before written texts, through memorization, then validation by consensus—these events happened in a particular time, place, and context. Therefore, a salient feature of the Pali Canon is the manner in which the Buddha tried to prepare his listeners

to avoid aligning his universal teaching with one side or another of a particular viewpoint or issue.

The Pali Canon is a vast body of language, many volumes in length, full of lectures, sermons, poems, anecdotes, repetitions, expositions, gushes of joy, and ruthless confrontation with the direst aspects of the human condition. Throughout all of this we can read about the Buddha in many circumstances. He addresses kings but never condemns warfare. He implicitly condones capital punishment. He seems to take slavery and prostitution for granted and does not condemn them. He teaches generals and warrior kings. He meets merchants and assumes capitalism, never commenting on it, or in a few cases, seemingly endorsing it, as when he discussed the responsibility that kings have to insure a free flow of capital for investment. He appears to have a soft spot for democracy and designed his Order of monks and nuns to in some ways follow the assembly-based democracies that briefly existed in the India of his day; but he never criticizes any established authority. He places himself in an eternal context outside of political and social critique. He accepts and even capitalizes on his social status as a member of the royalty who can casually circulate in the circles of monarchs.



Those people of the twenty-first century, who wish to recast the Buddha as a Gandhian pacifist or as a liberal Democrat will be sorely disappointed and rudely awakened if they take the time to dwell in the numinous, revolutionary psychology of the Pali Canon that is so searingly focused on its ultimate realization and so diligently constructed to avoid being enlisted in the cause of particular movements or beliefs.

But what about the Buddha's legendary role as the spokesperson of nonviolence, his injunction "not to kill" as one of the five moral precepts that are pillars of his Path?



Why does the Buddha go out of his way to tell little kids not to hurt a poisonous snake but to empathize with the plight of the poor serpent rather than to stone it while at the same time he refrains from telling kings not to go to war?

The greatest obstacle for twenty-first century readers in understanding the verbal component of the Buddha's teaching is the attempt to re-cast him as a European philosopher or as a Middle Eastern prophet. The Buddha was not a synthesizing social philosopher. He preceded—did not follow in the footsteps of—Plato's Republic and he did not attempt to outline an embracing critique of society as did Rousseau or Marx. Nor did he attempt to establish a religion with cosmology, ontology, theology, liturgy and ritual. He was not, as he is often misunderstood to be, an Indian analogy to Moses or Jesus or Mohammed.

In radical opposition to imposed, sanctified governments and religion, the Buddha taught a Path which some individuals may embrace, the more the merrier. But the path is walked by each individual based upon his or her own volition, his or her own Kamma, his or her own collections of motives, strengths, weaknesses, wishes and fears. The Path is chosen, and this activation of the sense of personal choice and intention is essential to its function as a guiding practice through the vicissitudes of life. If the Path

is imposed or passively accepted out of conformity or social convention, then it is not the Dhamma at all, for the Dhamma by definition contains effort, commitment, relinquishment, and realization. The further you walk, the more you will see, but you must power your own journey which is more than the scenery.

The Buddha never alludes to a Biblical or Eurocentric Messiah, or Apocalypse, or Elysium, or a Proletariat of the People. He does not promise any mass exit to safety that you can get merely by your presence in a historical era or by your personal beliefs or religious affiliations. He describes no magical ruptures in the world of causality and connection. Instead the Buddha stands smack in the middle of what we call today the scientific world-view, in which events derive from antecedent causes and provoke subsequent events, in an ongoing chain of which we can see no origin or end. Discerning the pathways of cause and effect is the essence of liberation from ignorance. Unlike religious thinkers, the Buddha avoids ontology. The universe has no known origins, no first cause. There are universes in incomprehensible infinity, a world of innumerable suffering beings... but also a Path of insight, wisdom, and liberation that is available through meditation on cosmic truths, and their psychological correlates, that we can live out towards its apogee in Nibbana. The Buddha unveils a world that is continuous, causal, fluid and secular.

The Buddha was not a social philosopher...nor did he attempt to establish a religion.

Discerning the pathways of cause and effect is the essence of liberation from ignorance.

The Buddha teaches different people differently because each person will hear, understand, and act differently as the Dhamma is presented. Even in the Sasana, the era, of the Buddha, there is no whipped-up guarantee that all or even most of humankind will walk the Path. Such historical fantasies would only be delusions, or at best drops in the bucket, of infinite planets, infinite galaxies, universes, and time, that the Buddha apprehends as reality. Let the Dhamma be spread as widely as is possible; let as many beings as possible walk the Path as far as is possible: this is his transcending, a-historical, compassionate imperative.



Returning to our question of nonviolence, the Buddha teaches the precept not-to-kill to those who eagerly and willingly embrace it. He never imposes it upon an uncomprehending or unprepared audience. He teaches nonviolence to those who are appropriately positioned by their Kamma to understand, to implement, and to abide by its consequences. There is no point at which the Buddha ran for public office, solicited money for the circulating plate, or led a political movement by standing on a soapbox and pounding a generalized social imperative into the multitudes. Instead, he encouraged personal development on the path of Dhamma according to each person's ability. If the village boys could learn compassion for a snake, he taught it. But when a king expressed weariness with war, the Buddha told him to step down from the throne, if he so desired. But the Buddha explicitly refrained from telling a king, who must administer law and protect his people, to become a pacifist.

When the small democracies of the Gangetic plain were militarily threatened by encroaching monarchies and sought the Buddha's advice, he said nothing about war nor did he preach nonviolence. Instead, he praised strengthening society through

assembly, discourse, attitudes of reverence, and social conservatism that treasures the wisdom of elders (the equivalent of a constitution). We don't know whether these democracies took his non-committal advice. All of them were exterminated.

In answer to the question, "What is a Buddhist response to violence?" I have refocused you on the fact that the Buddha did not teach Buddhism, and that he had no pat, generalized, text-based, religious fundamentalism to guide us in the quandaries of our plight.

Instead, he encouraged us to embrace non-killing if, when, and to the degree, that is proper for us, for the role we have chosen, and for our other commitments and developments in path-factors; and to facilitate nonviolence in others to the degree that we can raise it naturally from within them. To the extent that one is a Bhikkhu, that is a person (not necessarily a monk) who is systematically committed to the discipline of the Dhamma-life of purity and compassion, one will naturally be non-harmful to one's fullest ability. But in the complex welter of human affairs, specific action which constitutes nonviolence remains a vital discernment from which even the Buddha cannot extract us.

For example, in the long debates before the American Civil War, was nonviolence dictating dialogue and compromise to avoid the outbreak of war? In fact, this happened, decade after decade, prolonging the whipping, beating, rape, torture, and execution of African Americans, and, through compromise legislation, extending slavery's reach into the North via the Fugitive Slave act, which made slaves federally protected "property" even in states that had outlawed slavery. Was nonviolence dictating a war to liberate the slaves, a war that would claim 500,000 to 600,000 lives, more than ten times the American death toll in Vietnam? Or was nonviolence dictating pacifism, the refusal to kill for any cause, no matter how just? According to Abraham Lincoln,

the greatest danger America faced was the passive complicity of pacifism, which would subvert the will to finally eradicate slavery and its bestial implications. Much of Lincoln's struggle as President was to undercut the pacifist backlash that wanted to pull out all troops, end the war, save white American lives, and, well, just go on allowing slavery.

There may in fact be many roles for many types and degrees of nonviolence. Soldiers, pacifists, pragmatists, compromisers, and hermits may, in their particular time and place, each be contributing to or detracting from a nonviolent solution.

If there were a clear and simple directive in the Buddha's dispensation that would guide us to world peace, then Buddhist countries today would not be, as some of them in fact are, nations of detention, torture, execution, and civil wars that target civilians by the ten-thousands. Recently, Nobel Peace Prize winners banded together to bring attention to a country that proclaims Buddhism as its state religion, yet has among the world's most violent record towards its own citizens.



There is no Buddhism to save us from reality. We cannot hide behind Buddhism to exempt us as citizens from political, economic, social, legal, or environmental conundrums and responsibilities; nor is there any Buddhism to dictate an infallible set of mundane choices to improve the welter of the world. These choices remain our personal straits, through which we must pass to forge our future. Kings must do the work of kings, engineers have taken up work of engineering, gadflies feel called to the work of prophecy and warning, liberators face the anguished, ambiguous trial of ending the slavery that remains with us in the twenty-first century; Bhikkhus meditate and teach Dhamma...and cobras do the work of snakes.

Dhamma encourages wakeful, thoughtful, personal choices out of which we build our own and our society's future. We can use Dhamma as our global positioning system, our self-reflecting mirror and guide on our somber and creative human trek. I hope that everyone who is inspired by the Buddha's teaching will make it a lifelong, self-applied, provocation, to a deeply individuated set of choices and responsibilities, in discerning compassion and nonviolence, as is appropriate for their own age, condition, and abilities, free from cliché, free from religion, free from peer pressure, constantly revising and re-orienting as we go.

The Pali texts, the preserved word of the Buddha, are only the surface, the spoken level of the Dhamma. At the applied level, the Vipassana Meditation that the Buddha taught leads to direct contact with the vibrations at the subatomic matrix of the changing world—the vibrations of love and compassion, the vibrations of ignorance, hate, and fear. To fully walk the Path, we must jettison our clinging to views, our textual search for soothing answers, and plunge into meditation that kindles direct awareness of reality beneath transient forms. The Buddha taught not only the fourfold truth, and the eightfold path including the precept not-to-kill, but he also taught that Dhamma eventually becomes known to its practitioners by its taste, its flavor, its unique absence of mundane vibration.

He said, "Just as all the water in all the oceans have only one taste, the taste of salt, Dhamma has only one flavor." When we will learn perfect attunement to it, we will walk the Path as the Buddha did, vigorously nonviolent, relentlessly compassionate, palpably relevant to our times and to all times, and aware that we will still leave behind us the ongoing sorrows of the world.

Dhamma encourages wakeful, thoughtful, personal choices.

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The Emptiness of Concepts

Rajesh Kasturirangan

This talk was given as part of a weekend program at BCBS called "Cognitive Science and the Buddhist Understanding of Mind" in January, 2005.

As I think we all know, Buddhism and cognitive science are increasingly coming into dialogue with one another these days. For this interchange to be successful, something from Buddhism or something from cognitive science (depending on which side you're looking from) should affect the other in a way that really changes that field's mode of operation. Perhaps Buddhism, for example, in its dialogue with cognitive science, will expand its focus in some way that it did not before. For my part, I am excited about a particular contribution Buddhism can make to the contemporary understanding of mind and cognitive science. It has to do with concepts and how we understand concepts. Today, I want to give you a sense of what the problems are, the kinds of

things that have been done so far, and what a next step might be. It is a step that brings in a Buddhist analysis of concepts and applies it in a way that Buddhists themselves didn't apply it before.

Until recently, in cognitive science and the philosophy of mind, concepts have been seen as abstract. If you look at philosophers writing about concepts up to the late nineteenth century, their paradigms for concepts were mathematical concepts and their analyses used mathematical examples. Number and certainty were the kinds of concepts they really paid attention to. But we have come to learn that the things we privilege in mathematics are not what we privilege in normal, human discourse. So we need to shift our way of thinking about

concepts from abstract analyses to much more embodied analyses. Cognitive science is at a stage now where it's more willing to consider seriously the issue of the embodiment of knowledge. The context of our physical body systems, such as the fact that we have two arms and two legs, or that we have eyes in the front and ears on the side of our heads, may seem incidental to the way concepts are structured, but they are actually pretty important to what concepts are about.

Theory of Concepts

Let me start with the difference between an abstract theory of concepts and a metaphorical theory. An abstract theory of concepts wants to understand two things: "What is the definition

of a concept?” and “How is this definition actually true of things in the world?” Let’s take as an example this cup sitting before me on the table. We want to know not only what the definition of a cup might be but how the concept of cup so defined actually “maps” to the cup we see in the world or to all the things we call cups. This turns out to be one of those classic starting points everyone thought was going to be easy, but which turned out to be very hard indeed.

It’s like the story of the professor at MIT who, in the early years of artificial intelligence research (the nineteen sixties), assigned an undergraduate computing student what he thought would be a simple summer project: build a vision system that recognizes objects in the world. It turns out that is a very hard thing to do. Now, more than forty years and an entire computer science later, not only do we still not have a vision system that recognizes even faces, we don’t even know how our mind does that. So the hubris of the early artificial intelligence researchers is kind of laughable now, but that’s the way the field moves. There are many such painful and unexpected obstacles.

One impediment to our understanding of concepts has been a tendency to idealize both concepts and reasoning as logical and as going in certain analytical paths. But when you pay attention to the phenomenology of concepts, which is to say, how you actually use them, they turn out to be very metaphorical. Even in science, for example, when we build atomic models, we conceptualize electrons as hard spheres rotating around other hard spheres which represent the protons and the neutrons.

But, of course, that’s not the way those things are. We know through quantum mechanics that they are just not localizable.

Yet this metaphorical projection of what we know is the only kind of knowledge we have, so it’s what we use to understand our world and to transcend its own limitations. The real issue here is that we have this capacity to conceptualize, and that it is actually quite useful. It’s based on spatial and temporal ways of being in this world, and those



simple ways are what we transcend and generalize in order to talk about many more complex topics. These simple concepts of space and time that we start out with, I think, are valid concepts, and as a tool for understanding we map them, metaphorically, onto more difficult things.

Embodied Cognition

There is a whole field of “embodied cognition” these days, based on the work of people like Lakoff, Talmy and Johnson. It says we have basic concepts that pertain to the physical world, things

like force, space, and time, which we use and generalize in order to speak about everything else. We use so many metaphors: “Time is like a river,” or, “He’s the head of the government.” We can also look at more social or abstract phenomena. I might say of a particularly aggressive salesman, “He pushed me into buying the radio.” Here I am taking the term “push,” which has a primary meaning that is physical, and am metaphorically mapping it to something much more abstract in the psychological realm. “Pushing” here doesn’t mean physical interchange—there may not have been any contact between these two people—but somehow the psychological meaning or social relationship is conceptualized in the same way as physical relationships.

It works the other way too. In poetry, for example, we often use nonphysical language to talk about physical things; we anthropomorphize or agent-ise entities in the world. We might talk about the beauty or the lightness of the sunshine, qualities that from a purely physical perspective are not there. But even then there is something we learn about the physical world when we take this less physical cognitive language and map it onto the world.

I think science would not work very well if the only language we had to talk about the physical world was the immediately concrete, push-and-pull kind of language, because we now know that’s not the way physics works. If the only language we could use to talk about planets and stars and atoms involved things pushing and pulling each other, then Newtonian mechanics wouldn’t have happened, let alone Einstein and quantum mechanics and all of these other

wonderful things that we know about our strange universe.

The ability to metaphorically project meaning from one sphere of experience on to another is a very powerful tool that we have, which



is why metaphor is so crucial. If it were merely a weak tool allowing us to make simple analogies but did not give us a real purchase on things we find important, it would not matter so much. But it has a very strong functional use. Somewhere underneath these physics-like concepts is a structure that allows us to go back and forth from the concrete to the abstract. And that, to me, is the important structure that we need to nail down, both as cognitive scientists and by using Buddhist philosophy, because I think that in some sense Buddhist philosophy captures what is at the heart of the structure of concepts.

What is a Cup?

As cognitive science has moved from mathematically symbolic to an embodied metaphorical approach to concepts, we still don't understand the basic problem that metaphors are solving in some way. It is essentially a mapping problem. Where is it that concepts get the

structure allowing them to map between more abstract things and less abstract things? We can even start by asking something much more basic: how is it that concepts are able to refer to the world at all? How is it that when I say "cup,"

I mean cup? The utterance "cup," is just a sound. How is it that a sound ever gets to a thing? Experientially a sound has an auditory dimension, and maybe it has a meaning dimension, but

an object "cup" doesn't have any of these. This cup before me is green; it has a handle; it has shape; it has sides; it has location. The word "cup" doesn't have any of these. So how is it that something with geometric specificity gets labeled by something which has absolutely no geometric capacity at all?

The same kind of problem exists with the myriad abstract concepts which make up our world of psychology and social relationships. So much of our conceptual world has no shape or size or any physical structure, but somehow we are able to use physical language metaphorically to great effect. The deep question has to do with understanding the underlying structures allowing us to take these very different kinds of things and put them together. I think this capacity lies at the very heart of cognition. The chief factor of our intelligence has to do with taking things that are different from each other and putting them together. For example, the auditory system receives an input which is different

from a visual system. And yet when we perceive the world we map it into this coherent whole with both auditory and visual characteristics. This is the binding problem. How is it that an object, when we see it, has color, shape, size, all of them in the same location, even though the inputs into the system are very different things? Color is not like shape at all.

Another big problem with concepts is that they turn out to be hard to define. What, for example, really is a "cup"? Is it just something that contains other things? No, because what is contained? Fluids? Yes, but not exclusively. Is a cup something that has a handle? Not necessarily. If I took the handle off this cup, you would still say it's a cup. Is a cup something that has a handle and is of a certain size, but allows you to be able to drink? Maybe. But if you made a cup big enough for a person who was a giant, twenty feet tall, that would still be a cup for them, while for a child you'd need a much smaller cup. You can go through any concept you want, and it turns out that you just cannot nail it down precisely. This is a form of the same problem we saw before: precise, mathematical specificity is something scientists want, but is of little interest to human beings in their normal discourse.

Emptiness

Now is the time to bring in the Buddhist perspective. From Shakyamuni to Nagarjuna to Hui Neng, Buddhists have put forward a deconstructive and interdependent analysis of concepts. They have said all along that concepts cannot be seen as independent and isolated, and thus they cannot be fully

characterized. Concepts are useful to us precisely because they interact with other concepts. They're fluid, metaphorical, and projectible, not something independent of their functional, human, or organismic perspective. This is a perspective that I think even an evolutionary biologist would accept. It also gives us a useful possible hypothesis, which is that concepts are empty. *Empty* is a term that can be applied not only in the classic Buddhist sense but also perhaps as a contribution to a possible modern theory of concepts that formalizes what emptiness means in the realm of cognitive science and semiotics.

I don't want to get too technical, but the main idea is that the fundamental structure behind concepts is a structure that allows you to map one set of concepts onto another. It is the interdependent structure of mappings that is important, not the concepts themselves. What underlies concepts is this ability, which I think is an innate mind-structure or mental structure, that allows us to map very different kinds of things onto each other. And this is the fundamental, domain-independent, cognitive mechanism we have that allows us to be flexible in our intelligence.

To put it another way, the central capacity we have, which is manifested as metaphors when we use language, is the ability to take two different domains and map them onto each other. It is the structure of mappings itself that we need to concentrate on, not the various domains. The best way to understand concepts, in other words, is not to individually understand concepts of law, concepts of physics, concepts of chemistry, concepts of emotion,

and then study what they are all about. Rather it is our ability to link these concepts together that is important. I believe there can actually be a formalizable, scientific theory of those mappings, by which I mean specifying a relationship between two different domains.

Buddhist philosophy captures what is at the heart of the structure of concepts.

For example, we can map the relationships between words and objects, or between concepts of psychology and concepts of physics. This ability to map two different things onto each other is, I think, at the heart of the cognitive enterprise. Furthermore, emptiness, in a precise technical sense, is a fundamental insight into the nature of these mappings, i.e., the emptiness of concepts makes it possible for concepts in one domain to map to concepts in another domain.

Conclusion

So let me try to restate my basic idea. Cognitive science has changed enough that we have gone from thinking of concepts symbolically to things that are embodied, but we still don't have a theory of concepts. I think this is because we don't even know what the problem is, nor do we understand the phenomenon we are studying. We don't have a clue of what something could be if it can't be defined. The reason I find the Buddhist analysis of emptiness so interesting in this regard is because it is precisely a theory of

what things could be if they're not isolated and definable. There is a profound literature in Buddhism that addresses the question, "Why is it that everything is empty?" And it has been applied to all domains: "Things are empty of causes, things are empty of self-nature, causality is empty, definitions are empty, this is empty, that is empty." Within this language lies a logic of emptiness that drives our understanding of why is it that things are empty.

What I'd like to do is to bring that logic into cognitive science and use it to help provide a new way of understanding concepts. We need to recognize there are no longer independent, artificial things living in isolation which are definable and which can be studied mathematically. Rather, there are interdependent entities that have specific structures and follow a certain logic, but the logic is not the ordinary logic of yes and no. It is a different logic, an empty logic. I think the logic of concepts is a logic that accepts contradictions. When I say concepts are empty, it is not that the particular content of an individual concept like "cup" is without meaning, but it is saying something important about the relational structure that underlies them.

My guess is that reality itself is contradictory, and that ordinary logic is just the wrong logic for understanding reality. We are at a stage where even to understand the world we embody in concepts, we will have to bring in forms of logic that are currently seen as mistaken.

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Advice to a Dying Man

Anathapindikovada Sutta (Majjhima Nikaya, 143)

This systematic exploration of the phenomenal field of human experience is a powerful exercise in non-attachment. No need to wait until lying on your death bed to undertake it. Put aside an hour, find a quiet place, and try working through this map of the inner landscape, step by step.

On one occasion the householder Anathapindika was afflicted, suffering, and gravely ill.

The venerable Sariputta dressed, and taking his bowl and outer robe, went to the residence of Anathapindika with Ananda as his attendant.

Having gone there, he sat down on a seat made ready and said to Anathapindika: “I hope you are getting well, I hope you are comfortable. I hope your painful feelings are subsiding and not increasing.”

I will not cling to	the eye the ear the nose the tongue the body the mind	and my consciousness will not be dependent on	the eye the ear the nose the tongue the body the mind
I will not cling to	forms sounds smells tastes touches mind-objects	and my consciousness will not be dependent on	forms sounds smells tastes touches mind-objects
I will not cling to	eye-consciousness ear-consciousness nose-consciousness tongue-consciousness body-consciousness mind-consciousness	and my consciousness will not be dependent on	eye-consciousness ear-consciousness nose-consciousness tongue-consciousness body-consciousness mind-consciousness
I will not cling to	eye-contact ear-contact nose-contact tongue-contact body-contact mind-contact	and my consciousness will not be dependent on	eye-contact ear-contact nose-contact tongue-contact body-contact mind-contact
I will not cling to	feeling born of eye-contact feeling born of ear-contact feeling born of nose-contact feeling born of tongue-contact feeling born of body-contact feeling born of mind-contact	and my consciousness will not be dependent on	feeling born of eye-contact feeling born of ear-contact feeling born of nose-contact feeling born of tongue-contact feeling born of body-contact feeling born of mind-contact

<p>“Venerable Sariputta, I am not getting well, I am not comfortable. My painful feelings are increasing, not subsiding.</p> <p>Just as if a strong man were splitting my head open with a sharp sword, so too violent winds cut through my head.</p> <p>Just as if a strong man were tightening a tough leather strap around my head as a headband, so too there are violent pains in my head.</p> <p>Just as if a skilled butcher or his apprentice were to carve up</p>		<p>an ox’s belly with a sharp butcher’s knife, so too violent winds are carving up my belly.</p> <p>Just as if two strong men were to seize a weaker man by both arms and roast him over a pit of hot coals, so too there is a violent burning in my body.</p> <p>I am not getting well, I am not comfortable. My painful feelings are increasing, not subsiding.”</p> <p>“Then, householder, [said Sariputta,] you should train thus:</p>	
I will not cling to	the earth element the water element the fire element the air element	and my consciousness will not be dependent on	the earth element the water element the fire element the air element
I will not cling to	material form feeling perception formations consciousness	and my consciousness will not be dependent on	material form feeling perception formations consciousness
I will not cling to	the sphere of infinite space the sphere of infinite consciousness the sphere of nothingness the sphere of neither-perception- nor-non-perception	and my consciousness will not be dependent on	the sphere of infinite space the sphere of infinite consciousness the sphere of nothingness the sphere of neither-perception- nor-non-perception
I will not cling to	this world the world beyond	and my consciousness will not be dependent on	this world the world beyond
I will not cling to	what is seen, heard, sensed, cognized, encountered, sought after and examined by the mind	and my consciousness will not be dependent on	what is seen, heard, sensed, cognized, encountered, sought after and examined by the mind
<p>When this was said, Anathapindika wept and shed tears.</p> <p>Then Ananda asked him, “Are you foundering, householder, are you sinking?”</p> <p>“I am not foundering, Ananda, I am not sinking. But although I have long waited upon the Teacher and bhikkhus worthy of esteem, never before have I heard such a talk on the Dhamma.”</p> <p>“Such talk on the Dhamma is not given to lay people clothed in white, but only to those who have gone forth.”</p>		<p>“Well, then, Sariputta, let such talk on the Dhamma be given to lay people clothed in white.</p> <p>There are people with little dust in their eyes who are wasting away through not hearing such talk on the Dhamma. There will be those who will understand.”</p> <p>Then, after giving Anathapindika this advice, Sariputta and Ananda rose from their seats and departed.</p> <p>Soon after they had left, the householder Anathapindika died and reappeared in the Tushita heaven.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">—A. Olendzki</p>	



*Following a translation by Ajaan Thanissaro.

what we do when we are not paying attention

1. carrying water from the river
not reaching the hill
holes in the bucket
2. back from
retreat
room key

still in my pocket

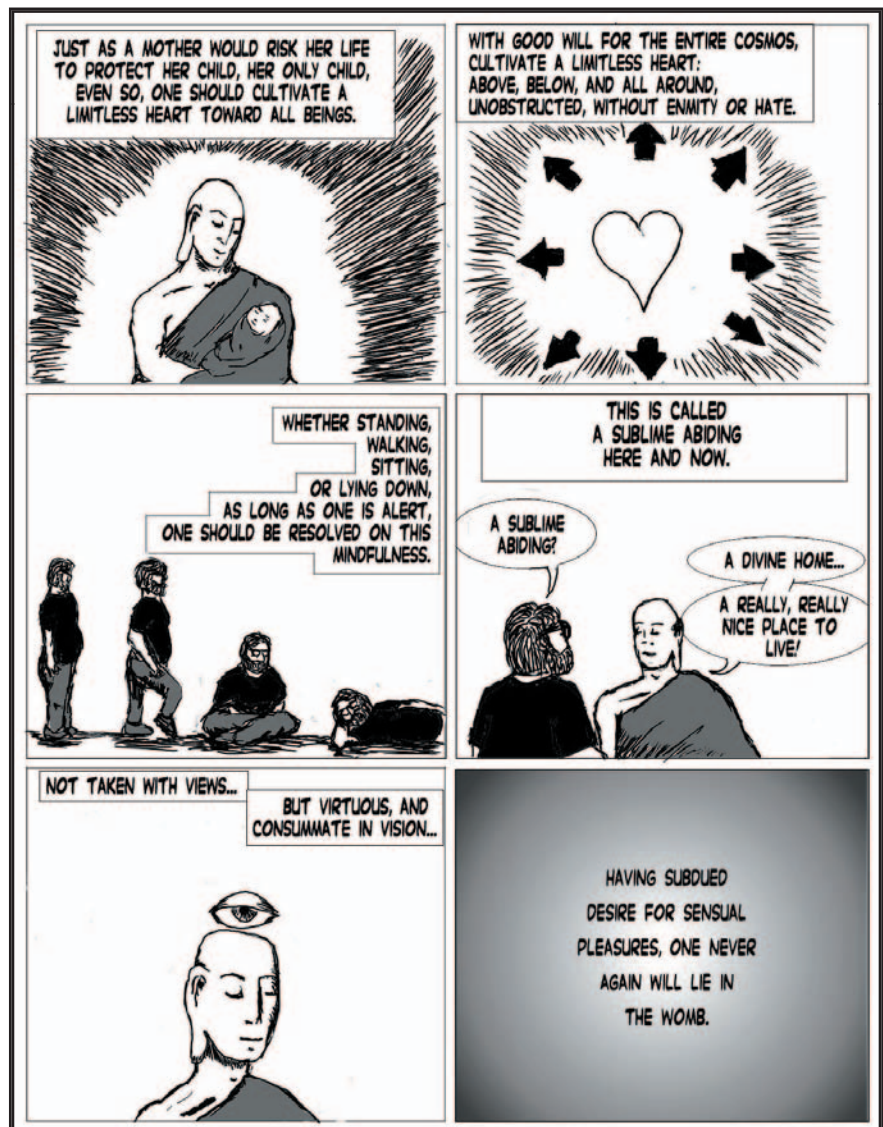
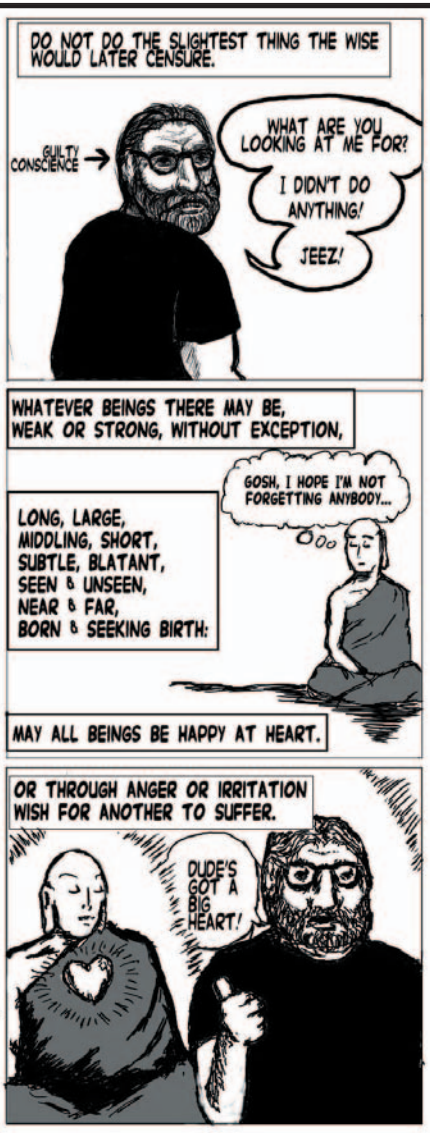
—Theikdi



This page contains material sent in by our readers. If you have a poem, drawing or photograph you would like to share with others, relating to your meditative insights or retreat experience, please send it to the editors at BCBS.

Only those who have
not run from it have been taught
the lessons of pain

—Palinda



DHARMA CONTEMPLATION

Soaking ourselves in the words of the Buddha

Gregory Kramer

*A new way of
integrating study and
practice comes to BCBS.*

As interest in Buddhist teachings becomes more mainstream, many people are beginning to feel a yearning for encounters with the Dhamma that are as close as possible to the source, possibly less colored by contemporary interpretations or emphases. While it is not possible to access truly unadulterated teachings—there is much debate about what constitutes the words of the Buddha and translations always add a layer of interpretation—the spread of sutta study groups and sales of books from the early Pali Canon attest to the longing for a more direct contact with the words of the Buddha.

Study groups offer some nutrition for this hunger, but for many people a primarily intellectual approach to these teachings seems incomplete or is alien to their character. Reading the texts on one's own offers valuable contact with the words of the Buddha, but people often find themselves put off by the occasionally dense material, alien language, or cultural particulars of these ancient texts. Also, it is often difficult to find courses of study close to our homes or convenient to our responsibilities. In these latter cases, the Internet provides many resources for self-study, but few that form real communities linking participants in actual practice of the path.

The practice of Dharma Contemplation addresses the need for holistic and intimate contact with root teachings. In Dharma Contemplation we soak ourselves in the words of the Buddha—or possibly in other root texts—so we can come to some direct experience of the wisdom they carry. The practice has evolved from three primary influences: the ancient Christian practice of *lectio divina* (divine reading), Insight Dialogue, and my personal experience of steeping myself in the words of the suttas to enable some breakthrough in my understanding of the nature of things. All three of these influences are still very alive for me as I evolve the practice further.

Lectio divina is an ancient contemplative practice from the Christian tradition in which participants immersed themselves in the Gospels. Its four-part form codified in the eleventh century inspired the multiple layers of Dharma Contemplation. Also inspiring is *lectio divina's* visceral sense of living the experiences of Jesus' life and teachings. Insight Dialogue is a practice I have been developing that extends silent and individual insight practice to dialogic, interpersonal meditation. Insight Dialogue inspired this practice by revealing the remarkable depths to which people can develop mindfulness and concentration

The spread of sutta study groups attests to the longing for a more direct contact with the words of the Buddha.

while engaged interpersonally. Insight Dialogue also helped me understand the power of peer-to-peer learning and the human potential for deep intersubjectivity. Most personally, Dharma Contemplation is inspired by my own experience with the suttas. As I sought to clarify my understanding of what the Buddha taught, I set aside not only contemporary Buddhist writers but even the later texts of the Pali Canon such as the *Abhidhamma* and *Visuddhimagga*. I thank Venerable Punnaji for his inspiration and example in turning to root sources. The only way I could understand and truly absorb these teachings was by pausing as I read and taking time to drop beneath cognitive experience and into a felt sense of their riches. I continue to absorb the suttas in this way and never cease to be amazed at how alive and directly relevant these teachings are in this very human life I live.

A key principle of Dharma Contemplation is that the wisdom we are contemplating comes directly from the Buddha via his oral teachings, teachings passed down in the Pali texts for two thousand years. Put another way, in Dharma Contemplation there is no teacher that interprets or otherwise mediates between us and the Buddha. Just as we can experience intimate and elucidating contact with a good friend or teacher—mind to mind, heart to heart—we can do so with the Buddha via his legacy in a remarkably direct way—human to human, Buddha to Buddha. Dharma Contemplation is designed to provide a structure to help us realize this capacity.

There are several forms of practice (for example, alone and in groups, online, and in-person) and all of them share four phases of contemplation: meaning, emotion, immediate experience, and meditation. While online practice is different from in-person group practice, the steady movement in both from understanding to direct apprehension is essentially identical.

So we see that the Dharma Contemplation group is not a “Dharma study group” in any traditional sense, nor is it a traditional meditation group. Dharma Contemplation is a hybrid practice of meditation and contemplation. It is based upon and partakes of the mental strengths of meditation such as mindfulness, inquiry, energy, joy, tranquility, concentration, and equanimity. Bringing text to this meditative mind is like planting a viable seed in rich, warm, moist soil; growth will occur. We invoke the power of the intellect—and collective inquiry—to dissolve and restructure our conceptual frameworks. In this practice we also bring our emotional and intuitive sensibilities—and those of others—to bear on these same texts, revealing something of their depth. We directly experience our lives in the light shed by these teachings. Finally, we come back to meditation, as the practice opens the door to refined understanding. We leave each session touched by essential wisdom.

Selecting a Text

The first step in Dharma Contemplation is selecting an appropriate text. A short passage is best, usually between 50 and 250 words, so that we can retain the whole in our awareness. Obviously, it is good to select a passage with some pith, what we might call a weight-bearing or meaning-rich excerpt. We have found that metaphors and similes unfold beautifully in this practice and give the passage a resonance that lingers. Simple didactic teachings can also work well. Indeed, the lists of this-leads-to-that, and that-leads-to-this-other-thing



Bringing text to a meditative mind is like planting a seed in rich soil: growth will occur.

We nurture confidence in the teachings and open our hearts to transformation.

type of passage, for which the suttas are so famous, can yield remarkable results as these morph from ideas to experience. I tend to be cautious with passages that emphasize revulsion or negative teachings, reserving them for use with seasoned meditators. The aversion and judgment they arouse in our culture can interfere with the receptivity essential to this practice. Finally, a text from another tradition can be workable, but it may lack the benefit of weaving itself into the vast vision of the Buddha's dispensation. I definitely recommend working with classical texts. In Dharma Contemplation the heart becomes sensitized and it is wise to honor this with excerpts from time-tested texts.

Here is an example, drawn from the *Anguttara Nikaya*, of an excerpt that has both a rich simile and an intriguing cause and effect chain. We will use this example as we unfold the practice guidelines. I will focus entirely on group practice, but individual Dharma Contemplation practice is also very rich.

...Imagine a tree abundant in its branches and leaves: its buds grow to maturity, its bark grows to maturity, its sapwood grows to maturity, its heartwood grows to maturity. In the same way, when—there being mindfulness and alertness—a person is abundant in mindfulness and alertness, the prerequisite for a sense of conscience and concern becomes abundant. There being a sense of conscience and concern...the prerequisite for restraint of the senses becomes abundant. There being restraint of the senses...the prerequisite for virtue becomes abundant. There being virtue...the prerequisite for right concentration becomes abundant. There being right concentration...the prerequisite for knowledge and vision of things as they actually are present becomes abundant. There being knowledge and vision of things as they are actually present, the prerequisite for disenchantment and dispassion becomes abundant. There being disenchantment and dispassion, the prerequisite for knowledge and vision of release becomes abundant.
(A8:81)

The Practice

A Dharma Contemplation session begins with a short period of silent meditation. During this time, participants settle together (in-person) or individually (online) in silence. We set aside our worldly desires and concerns and calm the body and mind. We nurture confidence in the teachings and open our hearts to transformation. We prepare ourselves to participate in and receive the teachings.

The Buddha's teachings were transmitted orally, and this is how we begin Dharma Contemplation. In an in-person group, the teachings are read aloud twice, preferably once by a male voice and once by a female voice. In online

practice, the participant listens to a recording of the excerpt being read. Individually, the text would be read aloud. Now we begin the first phase of the practice.



Reading—exploring meaning

Literal and figurative meaning is a foundation for all phases of the practice. It therefore unfolds in two or sometimes three layers: words as such; word and phrase meanings; and, when fitting, by the introduction to the group of commentary on the traditional interpretation of the text. Sitting in a circle (in-person) or at our computers (online), having heard the excerpt, we silently read the text to ourselves repeatedly, speaking aloud or posting those phrases that touch us or arouse inquiry. We pay attention to where the mind is drawn by interest, curiosity, or resonance. We share only the words of the text—single words or phrases, and listen deeply as others do the same. Our attention is thus called to what others notice that we might have overlooked.

Using the above excerpt as an example, we may hear (or read): “Maturity... mindfulness and alertness...abundant, abundant, abundant...conscience and concern...vision of release...prerequisite for knowledge...dispassion... abundant...” and so on, with each word or group of words contributed by a different person. Sometimes, unexpected words are brought forward or pivotal words are repeated many times in a kind of living poetry.

In the latter part of this phase, after the words have begun to soak in, we speak words other than the text. The orientation is still rigorously towards the text, but now we ask questions as to meaning and share knowledge and observations about the text. We avoid personal reactions and stories, however, and remain focused on layers of meaning in the Buddha’s words.

So in group we may hear (or read) such contributions as: “What does it mean to be abundant in mindfulness?” “Does conscience always have to lead to restraint of the senses?” “The buds and sapwood and so on all depend upon the nutrition provided by the branches and leaves. Are mindfulness and alertness the branches and leaves?” “When the Buddha speaks of knowledge and vision of things as they actually are, he usually means seeing things as impermanent, suffering, and without an abiding self.” “I don’t know if disenchantment and dispassion lead to knowledge and vision of release, and I don’t know what release means. Release from what?” “Might that be release from suffering?” “A tree has roots in the soil and is fed by sun and rain. Perhaps meditation feeds mindfulness and alertness and makes it abundant.” And so on.

The attitude in this phase is expressed by our slow and gentle reading. We savor the words and listen for the still, small voice within. We listen deeply, in a spirit of inquiry and awe. There are plenty of spaces for questions and statements to resonate and settle. What words and phrases speak to us? We dwell in and around those words and speak them into the silence of the group if they have the energy to be shared. We let the words and phrases shared by others touch us and arouse inquiry.

At the close of this phase it can sometimes be helpful, but is by no means necessary, to introduce commentary as to the traditional interpretation of this excerpt. This can help clarify meanings for some participants, particularly if no one in the group has a strong background in Buddhist thought. This type of addition, however, can also unduly influence the practice and should be used with care.

In in-person groups, a facilitator may ring a bell to signify the transition to the next phase of practice. In seasoned groups, the transition may occur

We listen deeply,
in a spirit of
inquiry and awe.

spontaneously. In online practice, the above layers of the meaning phase may take a full week. A new message thread is started for each subsequent phase.

Contemplation—encompassing emotion

Our challenge is to deepen our relationship to these words as we experience their subtle impact on us.

In this phase we allow the contemplation to expand to include emotion evoked by the text. As words are being slowly memorized, their layers of meaning unfold. We notice the resonances and images the words stir up in the body. This is where the cognitive meets the affective. Deep attention to arising experience ripens. As we take in sense stimuli—words and the images and thoughts they invoke—the body reacts and emotion arises. We can rest awareness on these immediately present reactions to the text. As we read and reread these words, what sensations arise in the body? What is our emotional state? Is there spaciousness and what does it feel like? Is there constriction, aversion, or confusion?

These teachings arouse sensations and mind states because deeper layers of the unconscious are being touched. We attend to these messengers of meaning. As we consider these emotional and physical states we are likely to be pulled from the thoughts necessary to describe them towards a personal story aroused by the practice. Rather than share these personal stories, we simply note what the tug towards personal stories feels like. We let go and return to the text and our felt response to it. In this phase the predominant focus is on the physical and emotional experience, still in response to the words of the Buddha rather than to each other's contributions. Our challenge is to deepen our relationship to these words as we experience their subtle impact upon us.

The attitude here is rumination. This is a time to hear “with the ear of our hearts” (St. Benedict). We remain stable and aware as memories, feelings and thoughts unfold. We allow ourselves to be drawn into the present moment of experience as the words speak to us. If a single word touches us, we stay with it, repeat it, dwell in it, and go beyond the intellect to a direct experience of the word as a collection of letters, a sound, an aggregate carrier of wisdom across time.

In group, we may hear (or read): “The word *abundant* is so enlivening. It makes me feel hopeful and energized.” “When I read *mindfulness* I feel like it's an old task; I feel drained. But *alertness* feels fresh and wakes me up.” “*Disenchantment* settles in my belly. It is both intriguing and a little scary.” “*Knowledge and vision of release*—yearning.” “This whole passage, including *concentration, dispassion, and vision*, grows in abundance from mindfulness and alertness, and that abundance and vision brightens my heart. Abundance is possible—even likely.” And so on.

Dialogue—immediate experience

We join together in the deeper experience of the Dhamma. We may speak the actual, textual words, but this is also a time to speak to our present experience as drawn out by the words. What is realized in this moment? This is a personal statement, not a theoretical one. We share our mundane observations, our pain, and our insights with the understanding that our capacity for non-grasping follows us into this everyday life. We are constantly refreshed by silence. Listening to the spoken truth of other meditators, each person's experience of

the teaching becomes richer and our mindfulness and tranquility grow. In the ample silences, we soak in each and every spoken word and each nuance of internal and external experience.

The attitude now blossoms into a full openness to the transformative wisdom of the Dhamma, and that wisdom touches this moment of experience. The text has saturated our minds. We recognize our capacity for freedom and allow ourselves to be changed by the word. We speak the truth as it arises in this moment, where the Dhamma meets this human experience. We hold up our challenges and our most exquisite insights. This is also a time to accept the compassion of others and offer our own, recognizing the complexity and vulnerability of this deeply conditioned being. We listen with full presence. Speaking and listening does not interrupt the silence nor the direct experience of the Dhamma. Rather, each spoken truth is met with wise attention and draws us ever more deeply into the moment.

We may hear in groups such contributions as, “Somehow I have lost touch with the sense of abundance I felt when I began practice. In this moment I feel it stirring again.” “I try to live my life with conscience and concern. Now I’m noticing—or even feeling—how this carries in it a connection to deep truth. I experience now the mindfulness within that heartfelt conscience.” “My mind flutters now between passion and dispassion. A longing arises for coolness without coldness.” And so forth.

Meditation—indwelling ripeness

There is a movement to silence as we dwell directly with the experience of the Dhamma that has unfolded. There may be the occasional words spoken early in this phase, but ultimately silence provides the background for a meditation that is mostly beyond words. In this silence, we may naturally recall the phrases and words that now saturate the mind. We may be aware of the body as it resonates with recent arisings. We rest in the immediate experience of the truths that have spontaneously emerged. The attitude now is one of letting be. We use words when helpful, let go when unnecessary. Once again wordless, we practice silence. We rest quietly in presence as experience yields insight.

There are usually few spoken or written contributions during this phase. We may hear the occasional sharing: “Concentration is abundant,” “Ease,” or “Gratitude.” By now, sixty to ninety minutes of concentrated practice have elapsed. In online practice, two weeks have now gone by. We end in silence.



So the path above carries us along to the emptiness of itself
The house and hall at its end an oasis of love, emptiness
Like going to the ocean for its oceaness I go to the Barre Center for its “emptiness”

—Michael Selzer

Gregory Kramer has taught vipassana meditation for more than twenty-five years. He is the director of Metta Foundation in Portland, OR, and teacher of Insight Dialogue meditation and Dharma Contemplation worldwide. He has studied with, amongst others, Ajahn Sobin, Ven. Ananda Maitreya and Ven. Punnamji Mahathera.

To learn more about these programs or to convene a Dharma Contemplation group in your area, please visit www.metta.org.

Caregiving

and the Buddha's Way

Susan Stone



When seen with clarity, any non-harmful activity can be a field for spiritual practice—be it hair dressing, astrophysics or feeding the cat. But caregiving would seem to have special status; spiritual qualities are part of the job description. Caregivers know well the challenges of trying to manifest compassion and selflessness on the job, while those who are practitioners of Buddhist teachings are led into even more complex challenges. These include struggling with the seeming contradictions of reconciling compassionate and selfless action with proper self-care while trying to live in alignment with the teaching of no-self; embracing the lessons of impermanence that are intrinsic to death and dying; and noticing how even the subtle odor of a personal agenda can foul efforts to make appropriate caregiving decisions.

These were certainly my experiences when I tended my mother as she was dying. Having left the Buddhist monastery where I had been living in order to care for her, and having been a practitioner for several years before that, I naturally turned to Buddhist teachings for guidance. As I have written elsewhere [see bio, page 29], the Dhamma [teaching of the Buddha] was right there to guide me, arising as a voice from within. Like innumerable other practitioners who have been caregivers, I am profoundly grateful to the dhamma, which has touched and transformed my life in ways so mysterious and beyond my puny (and dogged) efforts at control that I can only bow.

Years after my mother died, I consulted the Pali Canon for a more scholarly understanding of the teachings that had illumined my caregiving experience. This research was intended to neatly cover a single topic: dhamma references to caregiving in any of its aspects. But it became a surprising journey, one which evoked resistance and then opened into a deeper appreciation for the fullness of the Buddha's Way.

From the outset, my hope of finding inspiring references to caregiving seemed reasonable, for I knew that, in its broadest sense, caring is what the Buddhadhama is about. While the teachings are frequently said to be encapsulated in the four noble truths with their focus on suffering, its arising and its ceasing, they can also be summarized in terms of caring and its effects. Caring for the present moment is the essential thing and mindfulness the enabling practice. In a key scripture, the *Satipatthana Sutta* (M10, D22), the Buddha provides an assurance of awakening to those who properly practice the *satipatthanas*, i.e., those who care properly. The Ven. Analayo lucidly comments that the Pali word *satipatthana*, which is usually translated as "foundation of mindfulness," can more accurately be translated as "attending (or caring) with mindfulness." And Stephen Batchelor observes that even the Buddha's last injunction was for his followers to practice with care (*appamada*). Moreover, the theme of caring often appears in the texts metaphorically: the dhamma is portrayed as "the noble purgative," the Buddha as the "peerless physician," and practitioners as those who are cured by the medicine. The suttas [discourses] report several occasions when the Buddha visited the sick and offered them the medicine of the dhamma. No doubt many other such occasions were not chronicled.

Still, I was hoping to discover references to caregiving in its literal sense, words to inspire those who provide care to others and to affirm the spiritual value of their path. And, I did. The Buddha provided such inspiration by his example. On one occasion he personally tended a sick monk, washing his body made putrid by feces, pus, blood and urine. (Unlike Christ, the Buddha does not seem to have performed miracle cures. Textual references to his divine eye, to his abilities to vanish, and to recollect eons of world contraction and expansion leave little doubt that a mere healing would have been an entry-level power. However, as noted above, the Buddha's interest lay in a different kind of cure—that effected by the medicine of the dhamma.)

I also found inspiring the Buddha's comment, "Whoever, monks, would tend to me, he should tend to the sick" (Mv.VIII. 26.3). He repeatedly affirmed that "those who tend the sick are of great service" (Mv.VIII. 27.2,3,5) and he demonstrated immense care for sick monks by allowing them many special provisions and comforts to promote recovery (for example, Sv.XXX.1). These

*If you, monks, do not
tend to one another,
then who is there who
will tend to you?*



factors alone would have made me count the research a success. However, I could not ignore the fact that the burden of the material on the subject was anything but inspiring.

Excluding from discussion the *Abhidhamma* [a later collection of early Buddhist literature], which I haven't researched, most canonical references to caregiving appear in the Vinaya, the monastic code of discipline. Developed during the Buddha's day, the Vinaya establishes rules, standards of behavior and commentaries to guide the monastic *sangha* [community]. Contemporary Theravadin monks still observe its 227 training rules (*patimokkha*). Nuns observe more rules. Within the Vinaya, the book called the *Mahavagga* (*Great Division*) contains a lengthy section on medicine that enumerates in detail remedies and medical procedures that are allowable treatment for specific illnesses. A valuable compendium of medical knowledge in its day no doubt, these days it is largely obsolete. This information, conveyed in stories and instruction, was more than a medical reference for monastic caregivers; it was also a legal manual that stipulated penalties for transgressions. I found the punitive focus made for oppressive reading. Even more off-putting was the recognition that each ruling was a response to actual caregiver misbehavior. It undermined the easy assumption that monastic caregivers are so motivated by compassion and wisdom that they do not intentionally commit harmful actions.

According to the Vinaya, one of the five qualities of a good nurse is goodwill (Mv. VIII.26.8). The rulings, however, seem to give compassion short shrift. According to one case, monks who from compassion praised the beauty of death to a dying fellow monk in order to ease his transition received the harshest of penalties: defeat (*parajika*), which means permanent expulsion from the sangha (Sv. III.5.1). In contrast, a monk who for reasons unspecified administered medicine with the intent to kill a sick monk was not expelled because the sick monk survived and the caregiver later expressed regret (Sv.III.5.15). We cannot know the full context of these cases, but it is clear that judgment was based on the training rule that prohibits the taking of life. It hinged upon whether the patient lived or died. Compassionate motivation was not a mitigating factor.

According to Ajaan Thanissaro, [a commentator on the Vinaya] because issues about nurses' accountability when their patients died were so charged, monks have sometimes been reluctant to care for a sick fellow *bhikkhu* [monk] or teacher. Such reluctance may have been the reason why the Buddha occasionally stepped in to care for ailing monks. In the situation cited earlier, other monks were present who might have done the job but had refused. The Buddha used the occasions to admonish them, saying, "Monks, you have not a mother, you have not a father who might tend to you. If you, monks, do not tend to one another, then who is there who will tend to you?" (Mv. VIII, 26.3). Conceivably, those reluctant bhikkhus recognized that, unlike themselves, the Buddha did not risk penalty if the sick ones died. Possibly monks in the Buddha's day and later were further disinclined to give care because the practice of medicine was declared in the suttas to be a base art and wrong livelihood for bhikkhus (D.1.27). Translator Maurice Walshe adds a footnote in the relevant sutta, asserting that only the practice of medicine for profit was condemned, but the text itself doesn't make this clear.

Just as I was feeling fairly suffocated by this material, especially by the Vinaya, a monk at the Bhavana Society in West Virginia where I was initially conducting the research drew my attention to *Benedict's Dharma*, a book of reflections by

Caregivers know well the challenges of trying to manifest compassion and selflessness on the job.

contemporary Buddhists about the rule of Saint Benedict, the 6th century Christian monastic. It was fortuitous timing, for the book enabled me to understand the Vinaya in a new light. I realized that any reading must consider the fact that the Vinaya was not created to provide inspiration or guidance for lay people. It is not only futile to criticize it for not being what it was never intended to be, but such criticism misses a larger point: all spiritual life must be fortified with discipline. The Vinaya is the articulation of a disciplinary rule in the Buddhist monastic context.

It is perhaps paradoxical that to awaken into boundlessness, which is finally the sole “taste” of the dhamma, one must work through discipline, structure and boundaries. The Buddha, in effect, recognized this paradox, for in the Vinaya he often refers to his teaching as the *dhamma-vinaya*, literally the “teaching and discipline.” The phrase implies that the two components of the Way are complementary and together constitute the whole. Forms vary. Benedict’s rule is comparatively short and combines wisdom teachings and rules. In contrast, the Pali Canon is lengthy and contains a clear split, with the wisdom teachings found mainly in the suttas and the *Abhidhamma*, and the rules appearing in the Vinaya (though the Vinaya is not devoid of wisdom). Different as they are in structure, Benedict’s rule and the dhamma-vinaya serve the same noble function. Patrick Henry, editor of *Benedict’s Dharma*, observes:

Saint Benedict was not promulgating rules for living; he was establishing a framework on which life can grow. While a branch of a plant climbing a trellis cannot go in any direction it wants, you cannot know in advance just which way it will go. The plant is finding its own path, within a structure. (p.1)

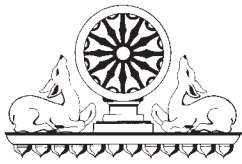
The dhamma-vinaya is likewise a trellis, a framework on which life can grow. The Vinaya offers little to support lay practice, but nurtured by the wisdom of the dhamma, lay practitioners have naturally found other forms of disciplinary rule. As Joseph Goldstein and other Buddhists observe in *Benedict’s Dharma*, lay sanghas perform this role today. Whether or not modern practitioner-caregivers participate in a community, they do not have to look far for their rule. It is the caregiving routine itself.

Although varying widely, caregiving routines by nature impose a stringent rule, involving timetables for administering meds, arriving at medical appointments, turning bedridden patients and the like. The rule also contains a moral imperative (the positive application of the precept to refrain from killing) to support and promote the emotional and spiritual wellbeing of the patient. One implication of this imperative is that caregivers need to be mindful of their own emotional reactions so as to not unnecessarily distress their patients. Violations can result in stiff penalties not only to the patient, whose health and wellbeing may be undermined, but ultimately to the caregiver. No sangha passes judgment as in the monastic model, but the caregiver’s internal judge is likely to do so effectively.

Once we as lay practitioners let go of the assumption, repeatedly asserted in the Canon, that the classical monastic model is the ideal, we are free to recognize the legitimacy of whatever discipline manifests in our life as our own Vinaya. When lived in conjunction with the dhamma, such discipline possesses an onward-leading quality. For caregivers this means affirming that the dhamma-caregivers’ Vinaya is an authentic and profound path to liberation.

Caregivers need to be mindful of their own emotional reactions so as to not unnecessarily distress their patients.

Susan Stone, Ph.D., has practiced in Theravada and Zen traditions since 1983 and has lived in monasteries for three years. She leads sitting groups in the Charlottesville, VA area and teaches retreats and workshops on the East Coast. She is author of At the Eleventh Hour, on mindfulness and caregiving.



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For complete course descriptions, teacher biographies and registration information, please request a free program catalogue or visit our website.

Advanced Study and Practice Program

The Barre Center for Buddhist Studies (BCBS), together with the Insight Meditation Society (IMS), is offering a unique, one-year program of advanced dharma study and practice. The program provides experienced dharma students with the opportunity to:

- 1) delve more deeply into the meaning and significance of the Buddha's teachings by study of the textual tradition;
- 2) creatively explore the relationship of these teachings to meditation practice and daily life;
- 3) cultivate sangha and support wholesome friendships.

In the broadest context, it is hoped the ASP Program will help strengthen the dharma community and ensure the quality and continuity of the teachings.

Program Summary

- Four weekends of study, discussion and practice at BCBS. Led by *Andrew Olendzki* and *Mu Soeng*.
- A seven-day study/meditation retreat at IMS in December, 2006. Led by *Christina Feldman* and *John Peacock*.
- Personal mentoring from a meditation teacher or deeply experienced meditator. Overseen by *Joseph Goldstein* and *Carol Wilson*.
- A sourcebook containing reading, homework assignments and guided meditations.
- Regular discussions with other participants through study partners and study groups based on proximity.

Program Dates: June 2006 – June 2007

Cost: \$1650 plus optional dana

The ASPP is limited to 50 participants and is by application only, due December 1, 2005.

Please visit our website to download an application and information packet.

UPCOMING PROGRAMS Fall 2005–Spring 2006

November 2005

6—11	Andrew Olendzki & Taraniya	Essentials of Buddhist Psychology
12	Harvey Aronson, with Anne Klein	Working with Anger
13	Anne Klein, with Harvey Aronson	Knowing Body, Glowing Mind
18—20	Mark Hart	The Paradox of Suffering
27—12/4	DaeJa Napier	The Brahma Viharas (Bhavana Program)

December

9—11	Susan Stone	Mindfulness and Caregiving
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January 2006

22—27	Paul Fulton, Trudy Goodman, et al.	Meditation and Its Clinical Applications
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February

5—10	Mu Soeng	Nagarjuna and Dogen (Bhavana Program)
17—20	Ajaan Thanissaro	The Potentials of the Breath
24—26	Chris Queen, Bernie Glassman, et al.	Zen, Peacemaking, and Social Action

March

3—5	Pat Enkyo O'Hara	The Koan of Everyday Life
9—12	Bill & Susan Morgan, Chris Germer	Meditation for Psychotherapists
17—19	Claire Stanley	Mindfulness for Educators
24—26	Jason Siff	Unlearning Meditation

April

2	Jack Engler	Seeking the Seeker
7—9	DaeJa Napier	Patience
14—16	Gregory Kramer	Cultivating the Wholesome
21—30	Leigh Brasington	Satipatthana and Jhana

May

8—13	Andrew Olendzki, Claire Stanley, et al.	Program for College Students
14—19	Andrew Olendzki, Taraniya, et al.	Essentials of Buddhist Psychology
21	Ajahn Candasiri, Sister Cittapala	Dhammapada Wisdom Teachings

June

16—18	Advanced Study and Practice Program, Group A. (See box, left.)	
23—25	Advanced Study and Practice Program, Group B. (See box, left.)	

July

14—16	Taitetsu Unno & Mark Unno	Shin Buddhism
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About the Barre Center for Buddhist Studies



The Barre Center for Buddhist Studies is a non-profit educational organization dedicated to bringing together teachers, students, scholars and practitioners who are committed to exploring Buddhist thought and practice as a living tradition, faithful to its origins and lineage, yet adaptable and alive in the current world. The center's purpose is to provide a bridge between study and practice, between scholarly understanding and meditative insight. It encourages engagement with the tradition in a spirit of genuine inquiry and investigation.



The Farmhouse



The Library

The study center offers a variety of study and research opportunities, lectures, classes, seminars, workshops, conferences, retreats and independent study programs. Its program is rooted in the classical Buddhist tradition of the earliest teachings and practices, but its vision calls for dialogue between different schools of Buddhism and discussions with other religious and scientific traditions. All BCBS courses involve some level of both silent meditation practice and conscious investigation of the teachings. Some courses consist of mostly classroom lecture and discussion with relatively short periods of meditation at the beginning and end of each day. Other courses are primarily an opportunity for silent and continuous meditation practice, with only brief classroom sessions or discussion groups.

Located on 90 acres of wooded land in rural, central Massachusetts, just a half mile from the Insight Meditation Society, BCBS provides a peaceful and contemplative setting for the study and investigation of the Buddha's teachings. A 225-year-old farmhouse holds a library, offices and a dining room that provide a comfortable setting for students, staff and teachers. A dormitory and classroom/meditation hall provide space for classes, workshops and retreats, and three cottages provide secluded space for independent study.



The Dharma Hall



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A Face So Calm

Samyutta Nikaya 1:10

Devatā:

araññe viharantānaṃ
santānaṃ brahmacāriṇaṃ
ekabhattaṃ bhujjāmanānaṃ
kena vaṇṇo pasīdati ti

Those who abide in the forest,
Peaceful, living the holy life;
Those who eat but a single meal;
—Why is it their face is so calm?

Buddha:

aññaṃ nānusocanti
nappaṇṇanti nāgataṃ
paccuppannaṃ yāpentī
tena vaṇṇo pasīdati

They do not grieve over the past,
Nor do they yearn for the future;
They live only in the present
—That is why their face is so calm.

anāgatappaṇṇāya
aññānusocanti
etena bālā sūssanti
naḷo va harito luto ti

It's from yearning for the future,
And from grieving over the past;
This is how fools become withered
—Like a fresh reed that's been hacked down.

—A. Olendzki

