
Clear Mind

James Baraz Weekend Retreat, June 26-29

James Baraz will lead our next residential retreat. James is returning to Madison after an absence (due to his busy schedule) of several years. Please see the insert in this newsletter for details on registration. This newsletter contains a dharma talk by James to give you a feeling for his thoughtful and supportive style. Get your registration form in early in order to be certain of a spot. If you have questions regarding the retreat you can call Tony at 608-661-9959 or tony.fernandez1@juno.com

PEACE PRESENCE: *Cultivating Peace in Ourselves to Bring Wisdom to the World*

This winter a new group, called PEACE PRESENCE, has formed in Madison. It is organized by individuals from local Buddhist groups including Madison Vipassana, Inc., Madison Insight Meditation Group, Madison Zen Center, SnowFlower Buddha Sangha, Shambhala Meditation Group of Madison, Isthmus Zen Community, and Deer Park Buddhist Center.

We began in order to bring a visible presence for peace to the Madison Community and to offer practice opportunities where individuals from all Buddhist traditions as well as other faith traditions could meditate together.

Our core activity is to offer a public expression of being peaceful in the world. We do so by gathering for walking and/or sitting meditation every Friday, from noon-1 p.m., on the corner of Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. and Doty Street, in front of the Madison Municipal Building, 215 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.

Depending on the weather and world events we've had from 5-50 people attending. We do walking meditation in the line, staying to the side so as not to block the sidewalk. Those who wish can also bring a zabuton and zafu to sit on the sidewalk. There is a wide and well paved area which has room for people to meditate sitting or join the walking meditation circle, and still leave ample open walkway for pedestrians.

Those who have attended always comment on how

much more peaceful they feel afterwards, and how much it does to establish clarity and ease of wellbeing. Everyone is welcome and we have basic walking and sitting meditation instructions posted on a sign. When the weather is nice we often have passersby join us.

For more information or questions about Peace Presence, contact Jan at 233-3844 or jrsheppard@sbcglobal.net.

PEACE PRESENCE also sponsored a day long *Meditation for Peace* on March 29, and, on April 19, *Peace In Every Step*, a mindful walk around the Capitol square, led by monastics from Thich Nhat Hanh's monastery in Vermont.

On May 11, we are part of a city wide ecumenical interfaith gathering that will involve presentations by choirs, drummers, dancers, storytellers, and various religious leaders. The event is called *We Are All One: Voices of Faith for Peace*. The service will take place from 7-8:30 p.m. and it will be followed by a candlelight procession to the Capitol. It will be held at First United Methodist Church, 203 Wisconsin Avenue. Free parking will be available in the Manchester ramp on the corner of Dayton and Wisconsin Avenue. For more information or flyers contact Carol at carol@mailbag.com

Engaged Buddhism Opportunity

Come out on Saturday, May 24 for fellowship and work practice. We meet in Mt. Vernon with members of SnowFlower Buddha Sangha at 9:30am to pick up trash on the section of highway that carries our names, and then to enjoy together. Please bring a sack lunch for yourself. It is very easy work, with a chance to get to know your fellow practitioners, both in the work teams and at the lunch. SnowFlower follows the very heart-centered practices of Thich Nhat Hanh and MIMG participants always enjoy meeting new friends.

We meet at the park in Mt. Vernon. Turn south off Hwy 18/151 onto County Rd G. When you get to Mt. Vernon, turn left at the "T" intersection with Hwy 92. Continue just past the right turn that would get you back onto the continuation of County Rd G. Take the next right and go one block to the park. For questions or car pooling call Dave Creswell at 274-8938.

New Kalyana Mitta Group About To Begin

Madison Insight Meditation Group currently hosts four Kalyana Mitta groups, and is about to begin a fifth group. Kalyana Mitta means spiritual friend in Pali. These groups are made up of individuals wanting to join with a regular group of spiritual friends to discuss practice issues and deepen their understanding of the Buddha's teachings. The groups decide for themselves when, where and how frequently they meet. Most of the existing groups meet monthly at the homes of the participants. Some meet on weekday evenings and some on weekends. A Kalyana Mitta group usually has 7-9 members. The groups that have formed have been extremely valuable for those involved and have been going for many years. The first group started in 1996 and has continued meeting monthly since then. It has had only one member drop out during that time. The other groups are equally stable and longlived. Participants report that they form very strong bonds with their kalyana mitta as it is sometimes the only group where they feel completely comfortable talking about their practice and its joys and challenges.

If you are interested in joining the Kalyana Mitta that is currently forming, please contact Cindy McCallum at 608-255-4559 as quickly as possible.

Weekly Weeknight Sitting Begins

Madison Insight Meditation Group is hosting a weeknight sitting every Tuesday on a trial basis. Our regular Sunday night sitting will continue as our primary activity, but in response to requests we have found a location to host another sitting during the week. Dale Heights Presbyterian has generously agreed to host our group for no charge. The sitting takes place from 6:30-8:00 p.m. each Tuesday evening.

The schedule will be to meditate for 45 minutes and then have an informal conversation about our meditation practice or a practice related issue that is raised by one of the people attending.

Dale Heights Presbyterian is located on a busline at 5501 University Avenue. There is free parking in Church parking lot.

If this is something you want MIMG to continue, please attend. We will evaluate the success of this initiative in July and may decide to discontinue it if there is not sufficient interest.

If you are interested in this effort, or have other questions about it, please contact Jan at 233-3844 or jrsheppard@sbcglobal.net

Working with Doubt, Deepening Faith

by James Baraz

Doubt is one of the five classical hindrances common to us all. Meditators get to examine doubt from a unique perspective—exploring how the mind gets stuck in it and possible ways to be free of its hold. It is one of the most incapacitating mind states humans can experience, since it suffocates our confidence and keeps us from taking risks. We feel helpless in its clutches. The mind can't see clearly. The image given in the scriptures is mud churned up in what had been clear water, making it impossible to see.

Two things to keep in mind as we explore doubt: it is impersonal and impermanent. Remembering the impersonality of doubt means that it is not you, but a mind state which has come unbidden to visit you for awhile. You didn't say, "I think I'll have a good bout of doubt right now." The fact that you don't have control over your mind may seem discouraging. But actually within that understanding is the possibility of genuine release from the predicament. Since we don't have control over the mood that's come, it's a misperception to think we should blame ourselves or take responsibility for this mind state. When we don't take the mood personally we can get some space around it, holding it with a loving compassionate awareness. That which is aware of the doubt is larger than the doubt. That spaciousness can see the drama without drowning in it. This shift of perspective is the gift of meditation practice.

No matter how thick and real it feels, it doesn't last. It's a mood that takes over us perhaps for a day, a week or even months. But it doesn't remain fixed. Sooner or later it replaced by other moods. Sometimes insight into the truth of impermanence, allowing us to let go, sneaks up on us. On my second meditation retreat I was experiencing a huge wave of doubt. I was a phony, the whole group of retreatants were all pretending to be spiritual, the practice was a bizarre exercise that seemed absurd and the teachers didn't really know what they were talking about. I couldn't sit so I tried walking meditation. I couldn't walk so finally I decided to give up and go lie down. When I got to my tiny cubicle in this retreat center in southern Washington, I saw a picture of Neem Karoli Baba, the guru from Be Here Now, on my dresser. His face was twinkling with a smile as if to say, "We're really taking this a bit seriously, aren't we?" In a moment, the drama broke and I started laughing along with him at how caught I'd been. The doubt instantly evaporated. I was quite excited thinking I had conquered doubt! I couldn't wait to tell my teacher.

Unfortunately, it was going to be about 12 hours before we spoke. Between that moment of "conquering doubt"

and the interview I went through every mind state imaginable—from confidence to exhilaration to exhaustion to confusion. When the interview finally came, my teacher asked me what was happening. In utter exasperation and innocence, I gave a bewildered sigh and blurted out, “It’s always changing!” To this he replied, “That’s the point. You see it for yourself.” Although I had heard this truth many times and thought I understood it, at that moment it hit me at a deeper level than ever before. Right there in the middle of doubt, an understanding of impermanence emerged.

Using mindfulness to directly explore the experience of doubt is the primary practice strategy. Feeling it in the body, investigating the landscape in the mind, we move from getting lost in the story to holding this old companion of doubt with wisdom. Just by naming it we shine the light of awareness on the situation and learn through our curiosity rather than struggling to fight what’s right here now. “Oh, this is what doubt is like.” However, if the mindfulness is not strong enough, the antidote to doubt is faith.

How can we deepen our faith? One source is reflecting on the Three Refuges—the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. The Buddha’s entire journey to enlightenment required tremendous faith. He left his family and practiced the greatest austerities, just because he sensed that something greater was possible. He showed the possibility of freeing the mind. As he said, “If it were not possible to free the mind of greed, hatred and delusion I would not tell you to do so.” Taking refuge in the Buddha is also the acknowledgement that you have the seed of awakening right within you if you can listen and hear the truth.

When we take refuge in the Dharma we are surrendering to what’s actually happening in the present moment. It is the understanding the life is giving us just what we need to wake up right now. There are no accidents. If we use our circumstances wisely, rather than thinking there must be some horrible mistake, we can open up to reality as it is to see the lesson at hand.

As an example, the weeks before my wedding day I was quite nervous. I knew that I had found the right partner, the person I knew could help me grow and whom I wanted to live with. But I didn’t know about this institution of marriage. Was it something I could really do and do well? There was tremendous doubt. Just a few days before the wedding, as I was besieged with doubt, while driving home I heard on the radio the song “All You Need Is Love”. John Lennon sang the lyric that in a moment reminded me of what I deeply believed to be true. “There’s nowhere you can be that wasn’t where you were meant to be. It’s easy.” That line was, for me, a direct connection to taking refuge in the Dharma. I was right where I was supposed to be. Doubt was instantly transformed into faith. The wedding proved to be an amazingly wonderful, fulfilling day. And I must say over 20 years later, there was good reason to trust.

The third refuge that fuels our faith is in the Sangha or community of like-minded friends with whom we share this journey. When we feel alone or isolated, it’s very hard to practice. I remember living in New York in my first year of practice, essentially hibernating during the winter, starved for support. A sense of community cuts through that isolation. We can be inspired by the example of those we practice with—on retreat, in sitting groups, or simply by one friend with whom we can meditate. Even books or tapes can provide a sense of sangha. We are also joining others in a line unbroken since the time of the Buddha. The fact that so many have found this practice led them to awakening and freedom strengthens our faith.

The deepest source of faith is our own experience, what we ourselves know to be true. Think of what you have learned to be true in your own practice, in your own life. Have you seen impermanence? Have you seen how painful grasping is? Have you seen how much richer life is when we wake up to it and experience it fully? Have you seen that it’s possible not to believe your thoughts no matter how unsettling they are? Whatever understanding you have arrived at, that is the greatest source of your inspiration and your faith. It cannot be taken from you.

The Dalai Lama says that if you must evaluate your practice, you should look at it over five or ten years. Have you experienced positive growth? Seeing positive changes in our life since our practice began can be tremendously inspiring to our faith.

Doubt comes to everyone in the course of practice even to all the great spiritual leaders. Jesus on the cross said, “Why have you forsaken me?” Just before the Buddha was enlightened, Mara challenged him with the question: “What gives you the right to be enlightened?” The Buddha-to-be responded to this moment of doubt by touching the Earth and as the witness for all the effort he made and his right to be liberated. The Earth is witness to all the sincere work we are putting in. We can have faith in our practice and in our experience.

As we develop more and more, looking deeply within ourselves—rooting our practice in faith, in what we know to be true—we access a place of wisdom inside, that center we can always return to in the midst of our confusion. At times when I am confused, I rediscover the power of the practice by just coming back to the present and breathing. I can trust the awareness that is meeting this moment will be able to respond wisely to whatever future moments bring. All that is needed is to simply learn to quiet down, to listen carefully the truth of this moment and hear the wisdom that knows how to respond.

Day-long Retreat (maybe)

Check our website (www.vipassana.net) for information about a possible day long retreat with Ginny Morgan this summer or early fall. This event is tentative but we will post information on the web if and when plans are made. Or sign up to be on our email list (you can do so from our website or go to www.yahogroups.com and enter "mimg" in the box asking for the group you want to join) to be sure you get information about this and other meditation related opportunities.

Thich Nhat Hanh Coming to Wisconsin!

If you've ever thought you'd like to sit a retreat with Thich Nhat Hanh, now is your chance! He will be leading a retreat at the Green Lake Conference Center (about 1.5 hours from Madison) from August 24-29, 2003. For details go to www.plumvillage.org and select the link to "summer 2003: events in USA" or call Cheri Maples at 608-266-6234, or email at cimaples@ci.madison.wi.us.

Madison Vipassana, Inc.
c/o Jan Sheppard
5717 Cedar Place
Madison, WI 53705

Clear Mind: the Newsletter of Madison Vipassana, Inc., Madison, Wisconsin

This newsletter is published periodically throughout the year to inform our members of our activities and of events of interest to the Vipassana community. Much of this information is also published on our website at: <http://www.vipassana.net>

Jan Sheppard: Editing, Layout & Design
Cathy Loeb, Duplicating & Distribution

To be added to the mailing list contact Jan at 608-233-3844 or email jrsheppard@sbcglobal.net

