

# Clear Mind

## Gloria Taraniya Ambrosia 3-day Residential Retreat, October 13-16, 2005

Madison Vipassana, Inc. is excited to welcome Taraniya as a teacher for this 3 day residential retreat at Pine Lake, Wisconsin. We are very fortunate that she has accepted our invitation to lead this retreat.

Gloria Taraniya Ambrosia has been offering instruction in Theravada Buddhist teachings and practices since 1990. She is a student of the western forest sangha, the disciples of Ajahn Chah and Ajahn Sumedho, and is a Lay Buddhist Minister in association with Abhayagiri Buddhist Monastery in California. She has served as resident teacher of the Insight Meditation Society in Barre, Massachusetts from 1996 through 1999. Taraniya teaches at the Barre Center for Buddhist Studies and at Dhamma centers in the United States. A selection of her dhamma talks can be listened to or downloaded at <http://www.audiodharma.org/talks/GloriaTaraniyaAmbrosia.html>

Details and a registration form for the retreat are on the insert in this newsletter or on the web at [www.vipassana.net](http://www.vipassana.net) If you have questions regarding the retreat, contact Tony at 608-661-9959 or [tony.fernandez1@juno.com](mailto:tony.fernandez1@juno.com).

## Taraniya at Sunday Night Meditation October 16

Taraniya has kindly agreed to stay in Wisconsin following the retreat in order to attend and provide the Dhamma talk at our regular Sunday night sitting. This is a wonderful opportunity to benefit from her teaching if you are not able to attend the retreat. Sitting will begin at 6 pm as usual.

## Madison Vipassana, Inc. expands the Board of Directors.

Madison Vipassana, Inc. is the organization that plans and provides residential and non-residential retreats and communicates with interested individuals through this newsletter. This summer three new members were added to the Board of Directors and two people stepped down after several years of service. The Board is grateful for the service of Todd Perkins and Dave Creswell who resigned during winter 2005. We welcome Cathy Loeb, Julie Meyer, and John Cotter for two year terms of service. They join continuing members Cindy McCallum, Lori Creswell, Jan Sheppard, Laura Berger and Tony Fernandez.

The Madison Vipassana, Inc. Board also serves as an informal Steering Committee for the Madison Insight Meditation Group that sponsors weekly sittings, monthly chanting, bi monthly half day sittings and periodic highway cleanup. If you have questions or comments about any of the activities of Madison Vipassana or Madison Insight Meditation Group please feel free to contact any of the members of the Board to discuss the matter. We welcome your involvement and good ideas.



## Appreciation for the generosity of the First Unitarian Society

You may not be aware that we are extremely fortunate to have never had to rent the space for the weekly meditations we sponsor.

Since Madison Insight Meditation Group began Sunday night sitting in 1995 we have used space generously provided by the First Unitarian Society. While some of those who attend Sunday night sittings are members of First Unitarian, we are a much broader community-based organization. The Society's willingness to welcome us and support our practice is in line with the philosophy of the Unitarian Universalist (or UU) movement. Unitarian Universalism is a non-creedal religion. Thus, members do not have to subscribe to a defined set of beliefs. Instead, the movement supports each individual's free and responsible search for truth and meaning. Although the roots of UUism are in the Judeo-Christian tradition, the valuable spiritual teaching of other faiths is acknowledged and cultivated. Some UUs identify themselves by the tradition that most informs their own spiritual practice: UU-Christian, UU-humanist, UU-pagan or UU-Buddhist. Michael Schuler, the parish minister, could well be described as a UU-Buddhist and he often incorporates the wisdom of dharma teachers in his sermons. He and many others at First Unitarian are happy that the church can provide a space for both members and non-members to practice the dharma. If you want to express your appreciation to First Unitarian Society with a financial donation there is an envelope available for contributions at our Sunday night sittings.

## Half Day Sittings

This fall we have scheduled two half day sittings at the Lower Meeting House of the First Unitarian Society, 900 University Bay Drive. The half day sittings will occur from 9 am until noon on October 1st and December 3.

The morning consists of alternating sitting and walking meditation periods. You are welcome to arrive on the hour at 9, 10 or 11 to join in. Following the meditation, at noon, we will share in a potluck lunch. For questions about the half day sitting contact Dave at 238-1234.

## Tuesday Night Weekly Meditation Changes Location

Just as we have been fortunate to have space made available without charge on Sunday nights, we have also had that same generosity offered by Dale Heights Presbyterian Church for our Tuesday night Group. Since 2003 we have met at Dale Heights weekly. However, as of July 2005, the location of the group has changed. Although we greatly appreciated the space offered by Dale Heights, we had to move into a smaller classroom space one week each month, and bringing extra cushions, a Buddha-rupa, candles, etc. was challenging. Our new meeting space is in a home that has an open space sufficient to fit up to 20 meditators and a permanent shrine with fresh flowers, candles, and a Buddha statue to welcome and inspire. We can also have some extra cushions available for any newcomers that do not bring their own.

The time remains the same, each Tuesday evening, from 6:30-8 pm. The new location is 9638 Shadow Ridge Trail, Middleton, WI. It is easily accessible from the beltline (12/18) by taking the Old Sauk Rd exit (#253) and turning west. Go 1.5 miles on Old Sauk Rd and turn right on Cricket Lane and then left onto Shadow Ridge Trail. Please attend whenever you are able.

## Practicing in the Thai Forest Tradition

If your practice is feeling dry and you'd like to introduce some devotional components, join us once each month for chanting and meditation. We chant both in Pali and English and have printed pages for you to follow along. We also chant the refuges and five precepts each month. To view some of the chants we recite download the Abhayagiri Chanting Book at <http://www.abhayagiri.org/index.php/main/books>: To read about chanting and setting up a place for practice you can download a pdf booklet at <http://www.abhayagiri.org/index.php/main/book/365/>

We gather on the first Monday of each month, 7-8:30 pm, 9638 Shadow Ridge Trail. See directions at [www.vipassana.net/weekly](http://www.vipassana.net/weekly) or in the article above about Tuesday night sittings.

## The Benefits of Retreat for One's Spiritual Practice by Gloria Taraniya Ambrosia

(This is an excerpt from a longer article. The full article is available in the Winter 2004 edition of *Fearless Mountain*, the newsletter of Abhayagiri Monastery at <http://www.abhayagiri.org/index.php/main/newsletters>.)

From time to time we may find that practice in daily life is not very inspiring. It's not that the teachings and practices aren't innately inspiring. They are. It's just that so much of our time in daily life is focused on other things — chores, work, relationships — that spiritual practice can just be one more thing we have to do. It can take many years (or many lifetimes!) before we become so imbued with our love of Dhamma that we see it everywhere and that practice on the cushion and off the cushion are qualitatively indistinct. Ajahn Chah said that it gets to the point where we see Dhamma everywhere. Everything we see is Dhamma.

In the meantime, we often need periodic jolts and reminders of what we're doing and why, of how much we love Dhamma and how deeply we want to be free. We get that kind of inspiration from retreat.

How does that happen? What are the components of retreat that facilitate such inspiration?

### Soaking in Our Good Intention

Retreats provide a wonderful opportunity to notice, contemplate, and actually soak in our right understanding and intention. We may not think about it that way, but consider what's going in when we make the decision to go on retreat. For most people vacation time is in short supply. We may want to use the time to go to the beach or the mountains, and that's understandable. The fact that we choose retreat over so many other options is a strong indication of quite mature wisdom. Our decision says that, fundamentally, we recognize that our spiritual practice is a worthwhile undertaking and that we wish to pursue it. This is right understanding and right intention — the first two steps on the eightfold path.

I like to remind people to reflect upon the

wisdom of such a choice, to make it fully conscious, to let it into our hearts. There can be an amazing reluctance to do this. Our minds seem to have a propensity for seeing what's wrong with ourselves and ignoring what's right. Our tendency is to be self-denigrating. When we start talking about our own goodness we can feel a little constricted — like we're not supposed to go there. "Isn't that being conceited? I don't want to be conceited." Or we might say, "Yes, but I have lots of other reasons for going on retreat and some of them are selfish: I want to get enlightened. I want to be a star." Or we might think, "Yes, I have good reasons but I'm not practicing from that level all the time. Most of the time I'm a lazy good-for-nothing."

Sure, there are mixed motives for going on retreat. That's how it is with everything. We aren't always in touch with our deepest aspirations and intentions. We get away from it and things become rote. But it is important that we realize that right understanding and right intention are driving our practice. These good qualities are coming from *this* heart, from "moi."

When we act upon right understanding and right intention we are experiencing the fruits of extremely good *kamma* and generating more of the same. The more we acknowledge this, the more consciously these good qualities will drive our daily practice. Daily practice becomes attractive and the tendency to turn towards the good becomes more and more automatic.

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### Experiencing concentration and mindfulness

Our daily lives tend to be filled with alternate episodes of agitation and anxiety, dullness and withdrawal, and distraction. These are common states of mind. In the Buddhist teachings we learn about states such as relaxation and tranquility, awareness and alertness. But what are these states which the Buddha describes? What is presence of mind? Is it even possible? On retreat, we have precious uninterrupted time to devote ourselves to discovering the experience of tranquility and awareness, concentration and mindfulness.

Notice I said the "experience" instead of "development." I make this distinction because all too often I have seen how people tend to have merely a concept of these states. We get ideas about what they are. We conceptualize them, put them in the abstract. When we do this, we move them to the head, and they become

something to think about and to acquire. With such a view, we will never truly experience ease. Our very effort is standing in the way. When we talk about having to “pay attention” or “become mindful,” — we can get a militaristic energy going: “ATTENTION!” Everything stiffens up.

On retreat we have an extended opportunity to examine our understanding **and** our experience of ease/concentration and awareness/mindfulness. When we hold these conceptually, as ideas, they become something that we are trying to become. This goes against the very heart of the practice. Buddha said that this tendency to “become” — trying to become something that we are not or avoid something that we are — is the cause of all our suffering. And we can do that with practice itself. We try to become concentrated, to become mindful, to become enlightened. We spend so much time “becoming” that we never actually experience what the Buddha is talking about.

Practice is about direct experience. What does it feel like to be easeful? What does it feel like to pay attention? What is the direct experience of these states? We learn about ease by being attuned to when

we are at ease and when we are not. We learn about paying attention by being attuned to when we are attending and when we are not. We come to know these directly not conceptually — “Wow, this is what it is!”

Gradually we see for ourselves that it’s better to be relaxed and awake than anxious or dull; and the heart inclines towards these. We experience them more and more. This kind of direct experience is something that stays with us when we leave retreat.

**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. Much of this information is also published on our website at <http://www.vipassana.net>

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