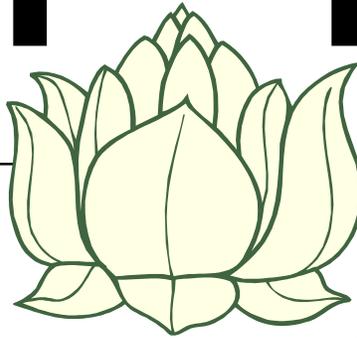


Clear Mind

Volume 13, no. 1

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Residential Retreat JAMES BARAZ June 1-4, 2006 Cedar Valley Retreat Center

We welcome back a much beloved teacher, James Baraz. James' clear and heartfelt teachings have been of tremendous benefit to those fortunate to attend his retreats and we are honored to have him back again. The registration form for this retreat is included in this newsletter. Please take note of the accompanying article that explains more about Cedar Valley Retreat Center and our registration deadlines.

This retreat is suitable for beginning or experienced meditators. The cost of the retreat, vegetarian meals, and a double room is \$250.00. In keeping with the Buddhist tradition there is no charge for the teachings, however, a donation to the teacher is encouraged.

Details and a registration form are included in this mailing as well as on the web at www.vipassana.net. Questions about registration can be directed to Tony Fernandez at (608) 661-9959. To discuss special needs for accommodations or food, email Julie at juliemeyer@ameritech.net

Please Register by March 28th for the June Retreat

Since the closing, in 2005, of the St. Benedict Center as a retreat facility here in Madison, the Board of Madison Vipassana Inc. has been looking for other suitable venues at which to hold our retreats. We try to find centers that can accommodate our group's size and need for quiet, are affordable, and are not too distant from Madison. So far we have had wonderful experiences with retreats held at Pine Lake Center in Westfield, WI, the Christine Center near Willard, WI, and, for nonresidential retreats, the Lussier Family Center in Madison.

The June 1-4, 2006, James Baraz retreat, offers an opportunity to experience another retreat center, one that we are very excited about for many reasons. The Cedar Valley Retreat Center is located on 100 acres of land just

outside the beautiful Kettle Moraine State Forest about 35 miles north of Milwaukee. The center has hiking trails that wander through a restored meadow and along a spring-fed pond. The staff have accommodated silent groups before so they are aware of our needs. Cedar Valley also has some single rooms available, which isn't the case for the other retreat centers we've used recently.

Cedar Valley is more expensive than the other retreat centers we have tried. We know that cost is an issue, so in an attempt to make the retreat similar in cost to our previous retreats, the Madison Vipassana Board has decided to use some of our funds to subsidize the retreat. [Note, as a nonprofit organization we do not intentionally generate funds. When our retreats are filled, and if travel and miscellaneous expenses are less than expected, we sometimes take in more money than needed to cover the retreat expenses. Those funds are maintained in a Madison Vipassana, Inc. account, to cover costs when our retreat does not fill, when expenses are higher than predicted, or, as in this case, when we determine we want to subsidize the cost of a retreat.] For this Cedar Valley Retreat, our actual cost per person is \$300, however the Madison Vipassana, Inc. Board decided to pay the difference in order to offer the rate of \$250 to everyone. Anyone who is willing to pay the actual \$300 cost should know that their contribution will be greatly appreciated. For those who find the rate of \$250 still makes the retreat more than they can afford, please remember that we do have a scholarship fund that may be able to help reduce the cost further. Contact Laura at (608) 238-7376 for details about the scholarship fund.

Each retreat center we use has different rules regarding the amount of deposit they require for a retreat and different dates when that deposit becomes nonrefundable. At Cedar Valley, we have a large deposit that becomes nonrefundable as of March 30. For this reason, **we are asking everyone's cooperation in registering before March 28, if at all possible.** Later applications will be accepted on a space available basis, but **if not enough interest is shown before March 28 we will have to consider canceling the retreat.**

Cedar Valley also asks us to specify how many rooms we will need no later than May 1, 2006. Because of this, we may not be able to accommodate new registrations after May 1st, because rooms may not be available. Late registrants should check with the registrar regarding availability.

Thanks very much for your cooperation! See you at the retreat.

Movie Dhamma Continues

Madison Insight Meditation Group held the first Movie Dhamma night in January. We had Twizzlers and laughed together as we watched Bill Murray practice one day of his life over and over in the movie *Ground Hog Day*. We decided that the movie was a apt expression of some of the Buddha's teachings, such as learning fearlessness, letting go of identity and self concern, and finding incomparable happiness in kindness, generosity, and compassion.

The next Movie Dhamma nights will be Friday, February 24th, March 24th (NOT on March 31st as was initially announced), April 28th, and May 26th. The evening begins at 7 pm and is held at 9638 Shadow Ridge Trail, Middleton, WI, 829-0944. Directions are the same as for Tuesday night sitting and are available on our webpage (www.vipassana.net).

The movies have not yet been selected, so if you have a movie that you think would be interesting to discuss in relation to the teachings of the Buddha, please send your suggestions to Jan at uppekha@yahoo.com. See you at the movies!

Half Day Sits: Deepen Your Practice and Build Community

Upcoming dates for half-day sits sponsored by Madison Insight Meditation Group are April 1st and June 10th. Half-day sits are offered five times a year on Saturday mornings. The morning begins at 9 am. (try to arrive a little early) and the formal practice ends at about noon. Afterwards those who wish to, share in a potluck lunch and have a chance to visit with one another. We follow a format of three forty-five minute sittings interspersed with two twenty minute walking periods. If you cannot come for the entire morning, you can arrive at 10 or 11 am. and join in the next sitting. By dedicating an entire morning to silent practice we are able to deepen our concentration and mindfulness. And the potluck lunches are always delicious both in terms of food and conversation. We try to hold the sits on the first Saturdays of February, April, June, October and December, but this schedule may vary, so it is a good idea to check a recent newsletter or www.vipassana.net for confirmation. The sessions are always at the First Unitarian Society, 900 University Bay Drive, in Madison. We usually gather in the Lower Meeting House at the back of the parking lot, but sometimes we meet in the West Living Room of the main building. Check the calendar on the door of the buildings for the location. If you have questions about the half-day sits, call Dave or Lori Creswell at 608-238-1234.

Buddhist Peace Fellowship Inter-Sangha Sitting March 4, 9 am-1 pm

The Madison Chapter of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship has coordinated three half-day sittings hosted by various meditation groups in Madison. On Saturday, March 4th, the Madison Insight Meditation Group will be the host. The sitting will be from nine until noon, followed by a sack lunch and discussion in the gathering room of the Lower Meeting House at First Unitarian Society, 900 University Bay Drive, Madison. The morning will begin promptly at 9 am. with some chanting followed by sitting and walking meditations and a guided metta (loving-kindness) meditation. We will break silence at noon and share a discussion over our sack lunches for those who can stay. This is a wonderful opportunity to share silence and community with our fellow practitioners from other area meditation communities. Everyone is invited. Please bring a sitting cushion and blanket to sit on if you have one. Chairs will be available as well.

A Joyful Heart In Difficult Times

By James Baraz

No matter what kind of day I've had, I know that waiting to greet me on my return home is my Buddha-ful dog, Pal. His irresistible mug pleads with me to get down on my knees and scratch his belly as only I can. My armoring releases as I bury my head in his massive curly-haired body. I remember to breath and be present for this delight that gives me perspective and lifts my spirits.

In difficult times we might ask, How can we allow ourselves to be playful and feel joy? For me the answer is that we can't afford *not* to. By inviting playfulness into our hearts, we move beyond our tunnel vision to seeing the totality of life and begin knowing not only the ten thousand sorrows but also the ten thousand joys.

The Buddha spoke of the value of a happy heart. He said that when we cultivate wholesome mind states—generosity, love, compassion, happiness for others—we experience *pamojja*, translated as “gladness” or “delight”. Delight is a part of our tool kit for keeping the heart open. Gladness and delight do not merely balance out negative tendencies, they actually transform the mind.

In the Buddha's teachings called transcendental dependent arising, he lays out how suffering can lead to a joyful heart. The list (what's a Buddhist teaching without a list) starts by showing how suffering, when held in the light

of wisdom and compassion, can be a causative factor for faith. Our hearts crack open as we see we have no control over life. Surrendering our imagined control, we learn to trust that we can meet what is present with wise attention. This is the birth of faith. Faith then leads to gladness, and gladness flowers into joy. So suffering, in the light of dharmic understanding, is actually a precursor to joy. We can choose whether to let our suffering lead us into a downward spiral or open our hearts to life, allowing the goodness to shine through.

Often wisdom and inspiration come in a joyful package. The Dalai Lama, who teaches that “the purpose of life is to be happy,” has certainly seen more suffering than most of us could imagine. Yet he has an infectious buoyancy and playfulness that delight anyone around him.

In recent years, I’ve been leading groups called Awakening Joy. The Buddha said, “Whatever one frequently thinks and ponders upon will become the inclination of the mind.” In our sessions we incline our minds to states of well-being, contentment and joy. One participant shared an experience he described as illuminating:

One day as I was driving in the city, there was traffic. I tend to get really frustrated and contracted when there is traffic; I get on a roll, thinking about everything that’s wrong in our society. Suddenly, that day, I stopped and asked myself, “Now wait a minute. Is there joy here?” I saw I could just switch the channels. I looked out the window and I saw the water. I looked around and noticed it was a clear day. I said to myself, “You know, it’s not so bad.” I realized there was a switch that I’m starting to nurture that I didn’t used to know was there.

If our tank of inspiration is empty and we feel we have nothing to offer, we need to find ways to nourish our hearts. Appreciating the water, the clear day, the warm bellies of dogs, we generate energy and inspiration. Life itself becomes sacred—something we’re motivated to work to preserve and share. As we access appreciation and joy, we are moved to share those qualities with others, making a difference in this world, helping move it from darkness to light.

There are many strategies to get out of one’s head and uplift one’s heart. Take on a daily gratitude practice. Express your creativity through writing, dance, singing or art. Spend time in nature. Do yoga. Get silly, play around little kids (at least for a little while!), watch a Mel Brooks movie. Remember to nourish your joyful spirit in these difficult times. We need it.

This article is adapted from an article originally printed in *Inquiring Mind*, Spring 2005.

What Is Contemplation? A question and answer session with Ajahn Chah

This is an excerpt. The entire dialogue is available at: <http://www.abhayagiri.org/index.php/main/article/42/>

Q: Is true contemplating the same as thinking?

A: We use thinking as a tool, but the knowing that arises because of its use is above and beyond the process of thinking; it leads to our not being fooled by our thinking any more. You recognize that all thinking is merely the movement of the mind, and also that knowing is not born and doesn’t die. What do you think all this movement called ‘mind’ comes out of? What we talk about as the mind - all the activity - is just the conventional mind. It’s not the real mind at all. What is real just IS, it’s not arising and it’s not passing away.

Trying to understand these things just by talking about them, though, won’t work. We need to really consider impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and impersonality (anicca, dukkha, anatta); that is, we need to use thinking to contemplate the nature of conventional reality. What comes out of this work is wisdom - and emptiness. Even though there may still be thinking, it’s empty - you are not affected by it.

Practice is not just a matter of talking about arising and passing away, though. You must see it for yourself. When you are sitting, simply see what is actually happening. Don’t follow anything. Contemplation doesn’t mean being caught up in thinking. The contemplative thinking of one on the Way is not the same as the thinking of the world. Unless you understand properly what is meant by contemplation, the more you think the more confused you will become.

The reason we make such a point of the cultivation of mindfulness is because we need to see clearly what is going on. We must understand the processes of our hearts. ...

Q: Is this mind you are talking about called the ‘Original Mind’?

A: What do you mean?

Q: It seems as if you are saying there is something else outside of the conventional body-mind (the five khandhas). Is there something else? What do you call it?

A: There isn’t anything and we don’t call it anything - that’s all there is to it! Be finished with all of it. Even the knowing doesn’t belong to anybody, so be finished with that, too! Consciousness is not an individual, not a being, not a self, not an other, so finish with that - finish with everything! There is nothing worth wanting! It’s all just a load of trouble. When you see clearly like this then everything is finished.

Q: Could we not call it the ‘Original Mind’?

continued on back

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Middleton, WI 53562

A: You can call it that if you insist. You can call it whatever you like, for the sake of conventional reality. ...

Q: What degree of tranquillity are you talking about at this stage? And what quality of mindfulness is needed?

A: You don't need to go thinking like that. If you didn't have the right amount of tranquillity you wouldn't be able to deal with these questions at all. You need enough stability and concentration to know what is going on - enough for clarity and understanding to arise.

Asking questions like this shows that you are still doubting. You need enough tranquillity of mind to no longer get caught in doubting what you are doing. If you had done the practice you would understand these things. The more you carry on with this sort of questioning, the more confusing you make it. It's all right to talk if the talking helps contemplation, but it won't show you the way things actually are. This Dhamma is not understood because somebody else tells you about it, you must see it for yourself - paccattam.

Simply keep putting everything down, and know that that is what you are doing. You don't need to be always checking up on yourself, worrying about things like 'How much samadhi' - it will always be the right amount. Whatever arises in your practice, let it go; know it all as uncertain, impermanent. Remember that! It's all uncertain. Be finished with all of it.

Insight Meditation Classes

Insight Meditation - Crse # 200-610-235

Thursdays, March 30 – May 4, 2006

6:30-8:15 pm., Edgewood College, Madison, \$55.00

Taught by Jan Sheppard.

To Register: call 608-663-3297 or send name, address, phone, email address, and fee to:

Edgewood College

Graduate, Adult & Professional Studies Office

1000 Edgewood College Dr

Madison, WI 53711-1997

Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction Program at the Center for Mindfulness

For details, cost and dates contact:

Kathy Bonus, 608-265-8325,

UW Sports Medicine Clinic, 621 Science Drive

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This newsletter is published periodically 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>

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