



CLEAR MIND



Volume 14, no. 4

The Newsletter of Madison Vipassana, Inc. Madison, WI

December 2007

Wisdom springs from meditation, without meditation wisdom wanes.

Having known these two paths of progress and decline, one should so conduct oneself that wisdom increases.

Dhammapada 282



Inside This Issue:

April 2008 Retreat	1
Relaxed Openness	1,4
Sunday Dec. 30th	2
New Year's Eve Events	2
Monthly Puja Practice	2
Timing Is Everything	3,4
Registration Form	insert

Residential Retreat with Kamala Masters, Myoshin Kelly and Patricia Genoud-Feldman, April 6-11, 2008

Madison Vipassana, Inc. is pleased to announce our first retreat cosponsored with Twin Cities Vipassana Collective. By working together we are able to bring three teachers and open the retreat to a larger group. In April, Kamala Masters, Myoshin Kelly and Patricia Genoud-Feldman will

offer a retreat titled "The Relaxed Openness That Invites Wisdom" at the St. Anthony Retreat Center in Marathon, WI.

To register complete the form on the insert with this newsletter and mail it as instructed on the form. Registration opens

on December 1, 2007. To discuss special needs or registration contact Julie at julie-meyer@tds.net. If interested in using our limited scholarship funds, please contact Laura at (608) 238-7376 for details and to discuss your situation. You are encouraged to register early.

The Relaxed Openness That Invites Wisdom by Myoshin Kelly

The idea for this retreat came one day when Kamala, Patricia and Myoshin discovered that we were all exploring aspects of meditation that come from a receptive, intuitive style of practice. Realizing that others might like to share in this investigation, we had immediate enthusiasm for working together as a team and exploring with people how to call forth qualities that support the emergence of intuitive wisdom.

This retreat will offer some balance for those of us who may be practicing with great ardency but have forgotten to be kind, patient and relaxed in our efforts. Many times we bring to our meditation a sense of needing to create, fabricate or manipulate our experience. It can at times be a brutal battleground. We try to achieve some state or way of



being that will radically alter our life. We forget that the whole point is to see things as they are. In this retreat we will be emphasizing relaxation as a means of settling into an acceptance of this moment, as it is, at the same time learning patience and compassion for the deeply habituated patterns

that keep reemerging.

The instructions will point towards the attitudes in our mind rather than techniques or skilful means. Our attitude is often unseen and becomes the filter through which we view

Continued on p. 4

Entering the New Year, Sunday Sitting, 7-9 pm, December 30, 2007 by Jan Sheppard

For several years, Madison Insight Meditation Group has had a gathering on the late afternoon of New Year's Eve. This year New Year's Eve falls on Monday, so we have decided to make our usual Sunday night sitting, 7 – 9pm, on December 30, into our annual New Year's Eve gathering.

As in previous years, we will have a meditation period followed by sharing from those who wish and then an opportunity for talking socially over juices (provided by the Steering Committee) and treats (contributed by anyone who wishes to bring something).

This year's theme will be considering how to enter the New Year in a way that is a blessing to oneself and to others. The Buddha gave a very famous teaching on this topic, called the *Mangala Sutta*, where he identified 38 strategies to act in ways that bring blessings. Our focus for the evening will be on the very first verse...

"Avoiding those of foolish ways, associated with the wise, and honoring those worthy of honor; this is the highest blessing."

After our meditation, we are all invited to share about the wise people who have blessed our lives and through our sharing, honor those worthy of honor. We'll have a large table set up as the focus for

our meditation circle, and, after the formal sitting period, people will be invited to bring photos or candles or some meaningful item to place on the table in honor of your wise person or persons who are worthy of honor. We will take turns placing the candles, photos, or other items on the table and sharing something about the person or persons we are honoring and why.

Your choice of people who are wise or worthy of honor is wide open; they can be living or dead, real or fictional, known personally to you, or only from a distance. For example, when I consider people I might like to light a candle for it is quite an array from Harriet Tubman, who first helped me to realize, in second grade, that suffering and oppression need not crush us, to Horton, of *Horton Hatches the Egg*, who taught me the fundamentals of kamma, that we are the owners of our actions and inherit their results; from my father, brother, and sister, whose deaths that were so very different one from another taught me enormous lessons about how we can live and die, to the Buddha, whose teaching of the Four Noble Truths helped me to make sense of all of these other teachers I'd benefited from throughout my life.

The Steering Committee cordially invites you to this end-of-year event and hopes you will attend, and if you wish, share about something or someone who has

blessed your life. All of you who attend our Sunday or Tuesday meditations bless our community with your efforts to be of benefit to yourself and others. May we all enjoy a wonderful New Year and awaken to the end of suffering in this very life! Questions about the event can be directed to Jan at 829-0944 or Lori at 238-1234.

Puja Practice

At the November retreat, Ajahn Amaro and Tan Jotipalo led us in a 'puja' each morning and evening. Puja consists of chants, taken directly from the Buddha's discourses, in Pali and English.

If you attended the retreat and found this practice beneficial, or if you didn't attend the retreat, but are interested, our group sponsors a puja on the first Monday of each month, 7-8:30 pm

The sessions are open to all, and no prior knowledge is necessary. We will learn and practice chants in English as well as in Pali, and also meditate together.

The sessions will be held at 9638 Shadow Ridge Trail, Middleton, WI. Directions are at <http://www.vipassana.net/weekly> under the description for the Tuesday night meditation. Also there is a pdf version of the chanting book that was used at the Ajahn Amaro retreat. Please feel free to download or print a copy for your own use.

New Years Eve: Yoga & All-Night Meditation, December 31, 2007 by Ann Dansart

Join us at Main Street Yoga, 1882 East Main St., Madison (corner of 1st & Main), to welcome in the new year. Tea and light snacks will be provided. Participants are welcome to join us for all or part of the evening. For more information contact Ann or Ravi at 608-442-6030 or visit www.namkaur.com/newyearseve

Practitioners of all traditions welcome!

7:30-9:00 pm Yoga

Join us for a lively and fun New Year's Eve yoga class where we focus on letting go of all of our "stuff" from the year that has passed, and open ourselves to welcome and celebrate the joys and challenges of 2008.

New Year's Eve yoga class and practices will be taught/led by Katy Wallace (www.humnat.com) and/or Ann Dansart (www.namkaur.com).

10 pm-5 am All-Night-Sit

All-night-sit starting at 10:00 pm New Year's Eve, and ending at 5:00 am on New Year's morning. This will include alternating half-hour periods of walking and sitting meditation, interspersed with optional guided yoga practice during some of the walking periods.

Timing is Everything by Jan Sheppard

How fortunate that it is difficult to schedule a colonoscopy! I needed to have one done since I had already put it off for eight years past the recommended age of first having one. In addition, I was switching health care systems at the beginning of the New Year and so it had to happen before then. So when the hospital called to schedule and only had one date that didn't conflict with meetings at work, I immediately said yes.

It never crossed my mind that scheduling a medical procedure only two days after a retreat was the smartest thing I could do. Coming off of the wonderful six-day retreat with Ajahn Amaro right beforehand couldn't have been more timely or helpful. A week of practicing mindfully made it quite easy to see the causes and conditions responsible for generating distress in the mind.

I hadn't realized that the 'prep' was intended to begin at 5pm the night before the 9:30 am procedure. The procedure was scheduled for Wednesday, and there was no way I was going to miss Tuesday night sitting. Many of us Tuesday night 'regulars' had been on the Ajahn Amaro retreat together and this was to be our opportunity to talk about the experience. I called the nurse and asked if it would be a problem medically if I started the 'prep' at 8:30 pm instead of the suggested 5 pm. She said it wasn't, it would just mean I'd be up into the early morning as it would take that long for the bowel to empty completely. That seemed well worth it – I was off all day anyway on Wednesday and could sleep in the afternoon.

As I began the process, my first realization was the way 'problems' were actually just fabrications by a mind that wanted certainty. For several hours the mind was continually generating questions: How long till something happens? Is this what is supposed to happen? How much longer now that something is happening? How much longer will I need to keep drinking this stuff? How will I know when I can stop drinking this stuff? and on and on. What was evident was a

strong belief that if only I 'knew' the answers to these things, if I could have some certainty about what would happen, how, and when, then everything would be fine. The beauty of having a settled mind was that I could see the seeking for certainty arise, and know it for foolishness. The clear mind could easily realize that really everything was fine even without knowing what would happen next, and that knowing what would happen next, even had I been able to know it, would not have made any difference in terms of what was actually being experienced. Being able to watch the mind running out and looking for something to know that couldn't be known; looking for something to stress about, was almost comical. I could just give it lots of space until finally the futility of endlessly generating unanswerable questions was so evident, and tiring, that the questions stopped arising and I could just be with the experience.

I also saw the way the mind kept wanting to solidify and define feelings, sensations, and experiences in rigid ways. At one point, fairly far along in the process, I was feeling quite full of the 'go-lightly' liquid but still had about 2/3 of a gallon left in the jug. The mind started to go into "I can't" mode as I began to sip from my glass, and then into trying out words to identify just the exact (repulsive, vile, nauseating, intense) ones to characterize the taste and smell of it. In fact the liquid was completely clear, and looked and poured exactly like water. So I realized the problem was not with the liquid, but with the stories I was adding on, and so I changed the story. I brought to mind that had I been in a desert and dying of thirst, this liquid would have been the greatest and most welcome thing in the world – it would have seemed just like having a gift of cool, clear water. Remembering that it was true that there could be a situation when I would happily and gratefully drink this liquid made it much easier to just keep drinking it. It still didn't taste or smell good, but I could know it was really not a big deal and that I could stomach it as

long as I didn't get trapped into my own stories about how bad it was.

The final 'gift of the prep' was a reminder of 'anicca', impermanence. Around 2:00 am I could tell that things were slowing down and I had a sense that I was pretty well through the process. In relief, I looked around the bathroom where I'd set up camp for the night by pulling in a chair and the latest issue of *Tricycle* (I had been so happy when it had come in the mail just that day!). Suddenly, I could see that my bathroom had become a sick room. The sink countertop was overwhelmed by the two medicine bottles with prescription labels and the glass with a straw – iconic images of illness. It was astounding how just those three items had completely transformed the room. Just three items on the counter and the fragility and changeable nature of the health of this body was impossible to ignore. I could feel grateful that within an hour I could toss away these reminders of sickness, but also know that "I am of the nature to age, I am of the nature to sicken" and there would again be times, likely with increasing frequency, when these symbols of illness would return either for me or my loved ones.

The clarity of this evening and these opportunities to rein in the mind from unskillful mind states and successfully redirect it towards beneficial mind states meant that the next day at St. Mary's Hospital I could be completely chipper and open to whatever was coming next. The whole hospital experience was interesting, bearable and mildly amusing. The nurses were kind; the unusual horizontal visual perspective from the hospital bed as I was pushed down the hall to the procedure room was like an amusement ride; the odd conversation with the quirky English doctor who told me she hoped to find polyps because otherwise it was so boring – all of it was just as it was and I didn't need to make it otherwise.

Continued on p. 4

The Relaxed Openness That Invites Wisdom (continued from p. 1)

the world. It is often colored by greed, aversion or delusion. If we are not aware of these states our practice becomes fueled by them and we inadvertently plant seeds for them to grow in the future. When they are recognized we learn for ourselves their effect, a learning that is supported by a gentleness of heart. The shift to a healthy attitude is much like a snake shedding its skin when it no longer is needed.

As we practice with a helpful attitude, an attitude that is based in relaxation, acceptance and ease, it helps us to meet whatever arises in the body and mind, whether it is pleasant or unpleasant. This is balanced by investigation that brings a non-interfering interest that has the capacity to connect with experience but is uninvolved. It is an

illuminating quality of mind that helps us to discern. Our interest becomes joyful when the mind is pointed towards seeing the nature of things.

When these qualities come together we find an increased capacity to stabilize awareness in a sustainable way, a way that is not reliant upon rarefied conditions but is connected to a willingness and an interest to learn from this very moment wherever we are. We develop a sense of listening to experience, an intimacy with experience that

is fully connected while at the same time we are not thrown about by it. When we are more aware, wisdom starts to emerge. Our practice becomes a discovery of the capacity to trust in awareness and let the dharma reveal itself. In this way we bring the dharma to the center of our lives.

This retreat is open to all who want to explore what it means to foster kindness, care and respect as a means of accessing our innate wisdom.

Timing is Everything (continued from p. 3)

What a gift to be with experience as it arises and not require it to be different. What a path the Buddha pointed out to us – truly a teaching that can be of benefit to us as we live and as we die. Thānissaro Bhikkhu calls the

Buddha's teachings "a decent education" because they "teach us how to live, how to die – how to deal with the big issues in life: pain, aging, illness, death, separation – because those are the things

CLEAR MIND The Newsletter of Madison Vipassana, Inc., Madison, WI

This newsletter is published periodically to inform our meditation community of activities and events of interest. This newsletter and other information is also published on our website at: <http://www.vipassana.net>



Jan Sheppard: Editor, layout & design

Cathy Loeb: Editing, duplicating and distribution

Peter Kaufman: Mailing list

To be added to the mailing list contact Jan at uppekha@yahoo.com

To be notified about the newsletter electronically, join our listserv by sending a message with no subject or content to: mimg-subscribe@yahoo.com

Madison Vipassana, Inc.
9638 Shadow Ridge Trail
Middleton, WI 53562-5604

that plague people." What good fortune and impeccable timing to have just been on retreat so that my "decent education" was fresh in my mind and there to help me at every moment.