

CLEAR MIND



Wise View and the Heart of Wisdom:

Retreat with Greg Scharf, March 13–16, 2014

Madison Vipassana is very pleased to welcome Greg Scharf to Wisconsin to lead a retreat March 13–16 at Holy Wisdom Monastery in Madison. The theme of the retreat will be “Wise View and the Heart of Wisdom.”

Greg Scharf began meditation practice in 1992. He has studied with a variety of teachers in both Asia



and the West and trained as a Buddhist monk in Burma. Greg has been teaching residential

retreats since 2007. His teaching emphasizes the natural unfolding of love and wisdom through the cultivation of mindful awareness.

This retreat will draw on teachings from various Buddhist meditative traditions, emphasizing continuity of present moment awareness as the foundation for clear seeing and the arising of liberating wisdom. Instruction in both insight (*Vipassana*) and loving-

kindness (*metta*) meditation will be provided. Insight meditation is the simple, direct practice of moment-to-moment observation of the mind/body process with relaxed, open, and careful attention. Awareness infused with clear seeing reveals that whatever arises in experience, including ourselves, is simply the natural display of impersonal conditions giving rise to lawful effects. As we learn to observe our experience from a place of stillness and balance supported by wise view, reality is accurately recognized, and liberating insight arises as a natural result. Loving-kindness meditation develops the heart’s capacity for patience, acceptance, and forgiveness as we connect with and care for ourselves and others.

The retreat will be suitable for both beginning and experienced students of meditation. Sitting meditation periods of 45 minutes will alternate with periods of walking meditation throughout each day. Retreatants will observe noble silence except during question-and-answer periods. Greg will offer a Dhamma talk each evening.

The retreat will be residential, with a nonresidential option for a limited number of practitioners. Holy Wisdom Monastery offers a beautiful and peaceful setting for this wonderful practice opportunity.

Registration fees cover room (for residential retreatants), simple vegetarian meals, teacher transportation, and other retreat expenses. The cost is \$350 for a single room, \$290 for a double room, and \$185 for the nonresidential option. In keeping with Theravāda Buddhist tradition, there is no charge for the teachings. However, a donation (*dana*) to the teacher is encouraged.

For details about the retreat and registration, see the enclosed registration form or go to madisonmeditation.org. Early registration is encouraged to ensure a spot. Financial assistance is available through our retreat scholarship program.

For a taste of Greg’s teachings, sample any of 75 talks available free of charge on the [Dharma Seed website](http://DharmaSeed.com). ❖

Better it is to live one day
seeing the rise and fall of things
than to live a hundred years
without ever seeing the rise and
fall of things.

— Dhammapada 8.113

Additional Opportunity to Practice with Greg Scharf

Join Madison Insight Meditation Group at our regular weekly meditation on Sunday, March 16, at 6:00 p.m. at the First Unitarian Society, 900 University Bay Drive. Greg Scharf will offer the Dhamma talk that evening. If you can attend his retreat, this will be a delightful way to hear more from Greg. If you aren’t able to attend the retreat, this will give you a chance to benefit from his teaching.

Freedom Is Available Here and Now

By Greg Scharf

One of the hardest things for us to learn in meditation is that our practice is not about having certain kinds of experiences. The path is not just about having good feelings or attaining some kind of special, blissful state. It's actually not about having any particular experience at all. Sometimes, of course, we do have powerful experiences in meditation. They may bring energy and inspiration and serve to bolster our faith. We may feel like something is happening, like the practice is working. As inspiring as these experiences may be, we need to bear in mind that, ultimately, the path is about freedom in any moment regardless of what's happening in our experience.

Often we'll find ourselves trying to make something happen, trying to control our experience so that we like the way it feels, so that it meets our criteria for what we find acceptable. Our focus goes to the particular quality or feeling tone of our experience, and rather than looking at our relationship to it, we judge our experience as good or bad, or right or wrong, based on whether or not we like what's happening. If we look a little more closely, we'll see that most of the time experience that has a pleasant feeling tone is judged as good or right, and experience that has an unpleasant feeling tone is judged as bad or wrong. Our strategy for finding happiness then becomes the quest to string together as many pleasant feelings in a row as possible, while at the same time trying to avoid having any unpleasant feelings at all.

Of course, we can never actually pull this off for very long. Life is not really amenable to our will, and this energetic movement in the mind

Freedom is to be found in our relationship to experience no matter what might be happening at any particular time. . . . This is a realization that is available in any moment, because it results from seeing the truth of the way things really are, from seeing the true nature of things.

leads to an exhausting and ultimately fruitless quest. We can't get our experience to be only pleasant, and even if we have pleasant feelings for a time, they don't last—they change when conditions change. No matter what, we're all going to get the full range of life's joys and sorrows. But we don't want to see this. It seems like bad news, and we're secretly holding out some hope that we're going to be able to reach a state where we have only pleasant experiences, as though being enlightened equals some kind of steady-state where things are always the way we want them to be. We forget that true freedom is not about having things be a certain way, but about non-clinging in the moment to any state or experience. Freedom is to be found in our relationship to experience no matter what might be happening at any particular time. The Buddha's liberation does not mean somehow escaping from life. Life goes on with its joys and sorrows,

but suffering in relation to this is another matter entirely.

In meditation we are interested in meeting the flow of life just as it is. In our practice we begin to trust the simple ability we all have to be aware, to know what's happening in any moment. We learn to recognize conditions just as they are without judging or blaming them or ourselves, allowing them to arise and pass according to their nature. Through this process, we start to recognize what we might call the essential nature of all conditioned phenomena: the impermanent, insubstantial, and ultimately uncontrollable nature of all things that arise and cease. As we see more and more deeply into these essential truths, there is a natural unbinding or letting go that begins to happen by itself. In a very direct way, we begin to give the whole process back to nature. We let things arise and cease according to their nature, and non-attachment and letting go arise as a result.

Freedom, then, is the realization of the mind and heart of non-clinging. This is a realization that is available in any moment, because it results from seeing the truth of the way things really are, from seeing the true nature of things. Freedom is not about getting anything, not about finding some pleasant state to hang out in for a while, but about non-clinging to any aspect of experience. It is the realization of non-attachment to any experience right in the moment. If we look at the practice in this way, we see that freedom is not an attainment in some future state of grace; it is available here and now. ❖

Against the Stream: Dana-Based Retreats

This is a story of verified faith.

In late 2011, Madison Vipassana invited Ajahn Sucitto, abbot of Cittaviveka Monastery in England, to come to Wisconsin to lead a retreat. Many of us had been listening to his Dhamma talks for years and hoped to practice with him one day. We were delighted and honored when he agreed to come in 2013.

Madison Vipassana had been putting on retreats for some 15 years and had already hosted two monastic retreats. But this retreat would be different: It would be run completely on a *dana* (generosity) basis. What's more, it would do so at a bigger facility and with more retreatants than usual in order to give as many people as possible the extraordinary opportunity to sit with Ajahn Sucitto.

Our customary approach has been to require a registration fee covering lodging, meals, teacher transportation, and other retreat expenses. We do not charge for the teachings, which are considered priceless and thus to be offered freely. Rather, we invite retreatants to offer *dana* to the teacher. This has been the approach taken by Spirit Rock Meditation Center in California and Insight Meditation Society (IMS) in Massachusetts, as well as by smaller centers and sanghas around the country that host retreats. Spirit Rock and IMS make exceptions for certain monastic retreats, however, offering them completely on a *dana* basis, and now we were committing ourselves to do the same in bringing Ajahn Sucitto to Wisconsin.

What this would mean is that retreatants would pay a refundable \$100 fee in advance to guarantee their place at the retreat. But otherwise, they would have the opportunity to practice with Ajahn

Sucitto for five days, housed and fed in a beautiful setting, without any charge. At the end of the retreat, they would be invited to offer *dana*. Ajahn Sucitto generously agreed that the *dana* would go first to cover our sangha's expenses, and then anything over and above that amount would be given to the English Sangha Trust, which manages the finances of Cittaviveka.

In accordance with Theravāda Buddhist tradition, monks and nuns cannot possess or handle money and are completely dependent on the lay community for their support. In the words of [Thanissaro Bhikkhu](#), they “live entirely in an economy of gifts.” This practice is intended to cultivate a rich interrelationship between the lay and monastic communities: the lay community offers gifts of material requisites to the monastic community, and the monastic community, in turn, freely offers teachings to the lay community. This mutual support has kept the Buddha's teachings alive for more than 2,500 years.

We were deeply inspired by the prospect of offering the retreat with Ajahn Sucitto freely, without charge. But we were also apprehensive. We expected retreat expenses to exceed \$16,000—an enormous and unnerving liability for a tiny nonprofit like ours. Not only would the retreat be offered without fee, but, unless asked, we would also refrain from apprising retreatants of the actual costs. Nor would we give the traditional “*dana* talk.” Any *dana* collected would reflect only the open-hearted generosity of retreatants at the conclusion of the retreat. What would we do if expenses significantly exceeded donations? How would we offer *dana* to Cittaviveka—something we were deeply committed to doing—if

we couldn't even cover our expenses?

It was a leap of faith, one that would truly go “against the stream” of a profoundly materialistic culture. After talking through the “what ifs” and the concerns they elicited, we took this leap of faith gladly, recognizing it as a rich opportunity to deepen our practice. And in the end, we were profoundly moved to find that faith verified. Through the generosity of those attending the retreat, we were able not only to cover our costs, but also to offer *dana* to Cittaviveka. We came away from this experience eager to try another *dana*-based retreat in the future. ❖

The practice of generosity is never about the specific gift. It might just be a spoon of rice. What matters is the quality of the heart and mind behind the offering. That's where the power of this practice resides.

—Greg Scharf

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Upcoming Retreats

Greg Scharf, Mar. 13–16, 2014 (residential/nonresidential)

Holy Wisdom Monastery, Middleton, WI

Sharon Salzberg, July 25–27, 2014 (nonresidential)

Lussier Family Heritage Center, Madison, WI

Community retreat, Oct. 10–12, 2014 (residential)

Pine Lake Center, Westfield, WI

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This newsletter is published periodically as a service to our meditation community. It is also available on our website at:
madisonmeditation.org

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