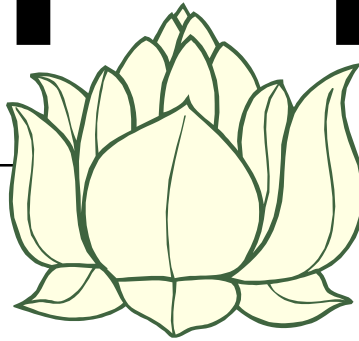


Clear Mind

Volume 12, no. 3

December 2005



Residential Retreat WES NISKER March 23-26, 2006

Pine Lake Retreat Center

Wes Nisker will be returning to Madison to lead our next three day retreat. Wes has been to Madison to lead our retreats a number of times. We continue to invite him since participants are so happy with his teaching.

This retreat is suitable for beginning or experienced meditators. The cost of the retreat, vegetarian meals, and a double room is \$245.00. In keeping with the Buddhist tradition there is no charge for the teachings, however, a donation to the teacher is encouraged. Financial assistance is available through our scholarship program. Contact Laura at (608) 238-7376 for details.

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

Movie Dhamma

Madison Insight Meditation Group is starting a pilot program Movie Night to view movies with other meditators and discuss the movie in relation to the Buddha's teachings. As a pilot program, after six months we will evaluate whether it will continue. Our first Movie Night will be Friday, January 27th, from 7-9:30 pm at 9638 Shadow Ridge Trail, Middleton, WI. Subsequent meetings will be Feb. 24, March 31, April 28, and May 26. Directions are the same as for Tuesday night sitting and are available on our webpage (www.vipassana.net). Suggestions for movies to view can be sent to uppekha@yahoo.com See you at the movies!

SAVE THE DATES

Our next residential retreats:

James Baraz, June 1-4, 2006, Cedar Valley Retreat Center, West Bend, WI (north of Milwaukee).

Ginny Morgan, October 12-15, 2006, Pine Lake Retreat Center, Westfield, WI (about 1.5 hours north of Madison).

Annual New Years Eve Meditation

If you are looking for a quiet, reflective way to begin your New Year's celebration please join us from 4:30 to 7:00 pm on Saturday, December 31st for our annual New Year's Eve gathering at the First Unitarian Society, 900 University Bay Drive, Madison, WI, in the Lower Meeting House.

Our theme this year will be compassion. As we reflect back on 2005 we will recall world events such as hurricanes, earthquakes and war which generated compassion in our hearts and may have led to compassionate action. Undoubtedly, we also had numerous events in our personal lives which called for compassion. How do we work with compassion and its near enemy (pity) and its far enemy (cruelty)? How do we respond to suffering without becoming overwhelmed by it? How do we make sure that wisdom influences our responses? As we move into another year that will undoubtedly contain suffering which requires our compassionate response, these and other questions are worthy of exploration.

We will begin the gathering with a 45 minute guided meditation on compassion. We then invite those who wish to briefly share some thoughts on compassion. This sharing could take many forms: a personal story, a poem or reading you have found meaningful. So that everyone who wants to has a chance to speak, we encourage you to limit your contribution to approximately two minutes or less. Of course you are also welcome to share by remaining silent.

We will plan to end the formal evening at about 6:15 pm, leaving us plenty of time to greet and visit with one another informally. A beverage will be provided. If you feel inspired, bring a favorite snack to share. If you have any questions about the event please call Lori Creswell at 238-1234 or Cindy McCallum at 255-4559.

SUNDAY NIGHT SITTING AS USUAL on December 25, 2005 and January 1st, 2006.

We will hold our regular Sunday Night sitting on December 25th and on January 1st at First Unitarian Society. Happy New Year!

Kalyana Mitta Groups and a Report From One of Them

Madison Insight Meditation Group facilitates local groups of people interesting in deepening their meditation practice and their understanding of the Buddha's teachings. These groups are called Kalyana Mitta, which means "spiritual friend" in the Pali language. Pali is the language of the Theravada Buddhist scriptures that first wrote down the words of the Buddha.

These Kalyana Mitta groups read, study, discuss and share experiences of integrating the dhamma in our everyday lives. They usually have no fewer than eight and no more than eleven members who meet regularly. Some groups meet monthly, some every other week. They meet in the homes of the members generally for 2-3 hours. Each group established their own patterns of frequency, length and location for the gathering. If you are interested in becoming part of a Kalyana Mitta, there is a sign up sheet at Sunday night sittings or you can call Cindy at 255-4559 to express your interest. You may be able to join an existing group if they have had members move away or drop out and we will gather names to begin a new group once enough people have expressed interest.

Laura Berger's Kalyana Mitta recently held a gathering that was healing for them and so she offered the following summary in case others might also be interested:

Our Kalyana Mitta group has 8 members, all women. I am inspired to share with you a recent structure we used that involved a focus on honoring those who have died and have meant much to us when they were alive. We all found this meeting to have been an especially powerful way for us to learn more about each other and to feel ourselves part of the river of both life and death. Our inspiration was the Mexican celebration of the Day of the Dead, which is a mix of pre-Colombian and Catholic concepts. While we wove in some of the traditional threads that are part of the Day of the Dead celebration, I will distill our structure to what was most powerful and direct in case you would like to use it. Kate Edwards is to be thanked for taking our thoughts and writing out the structure. The modified version is:

☸ Before meeting, determine how much time each person in the group will have for their sharing by taking the total time minus maybe 40 minutes (for meditation and opening and closing) with the remaining time divided by the number of participants.

☸ When you've gathered, create an altar with candles, flowers and other elements as inspired. Make it large enough to accommodate photos and other bits of remembrance from those in the group.

☸ Get settled and sit for a few minutes.

☸ Allow the altar to further evolve by each person in

turn naming the person or persons that they are putting on the altar and placing the items they've brought: photos, food, flowers, whatever you're moved to bring. Use your time to share something about those you've chosen to honor. It can be an anecdote, a memory, a song....

☸ A minute before the participant's time is up, a timekeeper will gently ring the bell.

☸ After everyone has had their opportunity to share, sit for 30 minutes.

☸ End with a few minutes of metta for all those who have died in the previous year, those remembered and those forgotten, from violence, natural disasters, illness and injury. Someone may light a candle in their honor and speak the metta phrases followed by silence.

Feel free to speak with Laura if you have other questions about the event.

Receive or Share a Ride to Sunday or Tuesday Night Meditation

If you are concerned about consuming gasoline, if you are living on a budget, or if you would like to support a fellow meditator who has no transportation to attend our gatherings, then consider signing up for MIMG ride share. Among the many benefits of sharing driving is getting to know fellow meditators and making new spiritual friends.

By filling out a card in the ride share box, which is available at most Sunday and Tuesday night, you can indicate where you live, when you typically attend sittings, and what type of ride sharing you are interested in doing. We are looking both for those needing rides and for those willing to offer rides to sign up. When another person who matches your location and preferences also signs up, names and numbers will be given to both parties. It is up to you to contact your "match" and to give ride sharing a try. You can contact Thia at 258-9992 with any questions or suggestions about his new program. We have already matched several partners to drive to our weekly sittings!

Half-Day Meditation Sessions

The next half-day meditation sessions will be held at First Unitarian Society, 900 University Bay Drive, Madison, on Saturday, Dec. 3, Feb. 11, and April 1. The first sitting will begin at 9 a.m. Periods of 45 minutes sitting meditation will alternate with 20 minutes of walking meditation until about noon. A potluck will follow the last sitting. If you can't come for the entire morning, feel free to arrive at 10 or 11 o'clock to join in the end of a walking meditation and the next sitting. Or just join us for the pot-luck. Mark your calendars!

SELF DECEPTION

by Wes Nisker

"Americans cling to the myth of individualism as though it were the only normal way to live, unaware that it was unknown in the Middle Ages and would have been considered psychotic in classical Greece." From Rollo May, *The Cry For Myth*

I wanted to escape myself. That's one reason why I started studying Buddhadharma and Asian mysticism. I yearned for a connection to the cosmos, the world, or the rest of humanity. I wanted to feel part of a bigger reality so that I could leave the small one I was living in—the separate, subjective, "me" monad. It was painful just being little old me. And I was not alone in my aloneness: there were a lot of other monads who desperately wanted to feel connected to something.

Many post-war middle-class children were pumped up with self, pampered and prompted to become special someone, to have it all, to be anyone they wanted to be. The most common advice given to me by my parents was to "be somebody" and "make something of yourself," as if I was nothing just being who I am. Meanwhile, the media promoted the idea of being unique, someone who stands out, while the rule of the economic game was that "you make it on your own." My peers in the sixties youth culture told me to "do your own thing"; the messages of the seventies were "find yourself" and "express yourself." Individuality was emphasized even within the counter-cultures, where a new communal ethos was also being promoted. I believe that for many of us, the focus on the individual self was so extreme, that we tried desperately to escape that single identity. "I need some *self*-help! Get me to group therapy, meditation, tribal events, rock and roll concerts—anything!"

Recent generations in the West have been shaped by the pressures of individualism. Perhaps never before in history have people felt so much on their own, without what anthropologists call "participation mystique," a sense of being part of a tribe or community, nature, the cosmos, or the divine. In his book *Constructing America, Constructing the Self*, psycho-historian Phillip Cushman writes, "The masterful, bounded self of today, with few allegiances and many subjective 'inner' feelings, is a relatively new player on the historical stage."

The modern self that lives in us at the beginning of the 21st Century has an extreme sense of its own autonomy and separateness. In the mirror of our culture, and in the mirror of our private bathrooms we see only the individual, which is, of course, a completely distorted image of reality. We think and act as though we are independent of the external world, outside of any context or gestalt, whether

that of a god or biological evolution.

Ironically, while many of us seem completely lost in our individual dramas, our culture has become acutely aware of how interwoven we are into the fabric of all things, from the atoms we share with the stars and the stones, to the DNA molecule we share with all other living beings, to the growing awareness of how much our behavior is inherited from the life that came before us. We know that we are inseparable from the great streams of biological and cosmic evolution, a part of the whole, and yet we wander around in what Alan Watts called our "skin encapsulated egos," sensing ourselves, from moment to moment as isolate and autonomous. Our intellectual understanding of who we are is therefore completely out of sync with our felt sense of ourselves. I believe that this dissonance is what led many of us to seek help in the Asian wisdom traditions, where a major emphasis is on seeing through the individual self, into the "web of Indra," the interrelatedness of all things.

The modern self that we carry inside of us is a phenomena of nature and history. We can't blame it on Descartes, Adam Smith, Whitman, Dr. Spock or anybody else. Besides, with all of its faults, this modern self has brought with it the development of extraordinary social and political freedoms as well as great material comforts. Very few of us would trade places with a medieval peasant, even if it meant having a deep feeling of interconnection with the world, since the world we would be deeply interconnected with would be that of a medieval peasant.

Nonetheless, it is increasingly clear that our modern self is somehow out of balance. Our perceived separation from the world has grown much too extreme, and as a result both we and the world are suffering. The Buddha's teachings have perhaps spoken to so many in the West today, because he shows us that our suffering is directly related to our self-involvement. Buddhist meditation practices are a way to loosen our intense identification with our own drama, and offer both relief and a corrective to our civilization's extremes of selfhood. The growing popularity of meditation may be a sign that the evolving self is now seeking a new equilibrium, a middle way. It just might be that self-consciousness has become masterful enough to see through its own hubris, and we are now coming to a more sane and satisfying understanding of who we are in the world.

Santikaro Residential Retreat

Twin Cities Vipassana Cooperative is sponsoring a residential retreat with Santikaro at the Christine Center in Willard, WI. Participants can attend from Jan. 27-29, or Jan. 27-Feb.4, 2006. Details and information at www.tcvv.info or call David at (612)724-9357.

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

Upcoming Meditation Classes: Introduction to Insight Meditation

This class will introduce the basic principles of breath based meditation practice in order to cultivate ease, clarity, kindness and mindful awareness in our daily lives. Participants will learn techniques to encourage mindfulness while sitting, walking, eating and as we go through each day. Taught by Jan Sheppard.

Mondays, February 13 – March 13, 2006

6:00-7:30 p.m.

Yen-nien Daoguan, Madison

2929 Atwood Avenue, Suite 100, Madison, WI, 53515

Fee: \$50 (please contact Kathryn at 251-4726 if the fee is an obstacle to participation and some adjustment may be possible.) **Questions:** call Jan Sheppard at 829-0944.

To Register: send Name, address, phone, email address, and fee to:

YND, Madison

801 Emerson St.

Madison, WI 53715

Jan will also be teaching an introductory class at Edgewood College in spring semester, probably on Thursday evenings. Details are still being determined. Call Jan for more information.

Dana for Fellow Meditators

As Charles Dickens has so eloquently pointed out, “At this festive season of the year, Mr. Scrooge... it is more than usually desirable that we should make some slight provisions...” to share our good fortune with others. As you consider your own gift giving this year, please consider the gift of meditation through a donation to the Madison Vipassana, Inc. Scholarship Fund. Donations allow those who need financial assistance to attend our retreats. Madison Vipassana is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization under the Internal Revenue Code. Donations are eligible for the charitable deduction if you itemize deductions on your federal tax return. Your generosity is appreciated. Donations can be placed in the envelope on Sunday nights or other arrangements can be made by contacting Tony, our Treasurer, at (608)661-9959.

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 and Distribution. To be added to the mailing list contact Jan at 829-0944 or uppekha@yahoo.com