

Washington
Mindfulness
Community

Sangha Reflections

Winter 2001

Newsletter of the Washington Mindfulness Community

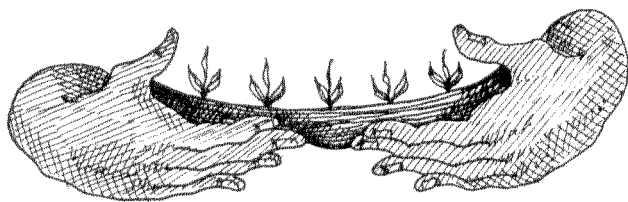
In Gratitude

By Erica Hamilton



In graduate school, I raced around, involved in at least five projects at any one time. But actually, I was doing too much. I was always planning a project or running late for a meeting or organizing an event. I ran myself down and by my third year of my doctoral program in community psychology, I was so sick with a chronic illness that I had to take a leave of absence.

On leave of absence I went to France in January 2000 and fell more ill. The medicines were not really helping and I could barely function. I decided, after 2 months of continual pain, that I needed to go to Plum Village for a week, to see if meditation would help. I had read Thich Nhat Hanh's books for years and had dipped into mindfulness, but this would be a full-fledged dive.



I stayed at Plum Village for almost six weeks. Each day, I felt more vitality. And each day, I appreciated the earth and the wonders of life more and more.

I remember my excitement upon waking one morning when I realized that the beautiful rose sky illuminated by a sunrise was reflecting onto the setting full moon in the west. Several of the sisters and I watched it blissfully with smiles on our faces until breakfast was served...

I sat for hours in the "mint marsh" of the lower hamlet, taking in the scent and the soft sound of water running into the small pond surrounded by trees...

One day, I rode a mountain bike about 25 kilometers and ate lunch in a wheat field. There I watched the grains sway together in the wind as the sun nourished them with light. I looked at bread in a completely different light after that. Each time I eat bread or crackers or bake something with flour, I thank those beautiful wheat grains swaying to and fro...

And now that I am back in the United States and working for an environmental organization, I appreciate the sky and the earth beneath my feet as I am walking to the metro station or riding my bike to work. I stop to smell roses and rosemary on my way. I eat outside and look upon my food in the same way I looked upon those wheat fields in France, with profound gratitude.

I realized at Plum Village, that expressing gratitude for food, shelter, clothing, and work and the presence of others is a way of connecting

In Gratitude

a song by Irene D'Auria

In gratitude you have watered seeds
of love in me, in gratitude.
In gratitude I will water seeds of
love in someone too.

I know you're there for me,
And I am so happy.

In gratitude you have watered seeds
of love in me, in gratitude.
In gratitude I will water seeds of
love in someone too.

And when you suffer some,
Please call and I will come.

In gratitude you have watered seeds
of love in me, in gratitude.
In gratitude I will water seeds of
love in someone too.

The Washington Mindfulness Community, formed in 1989, is composed of men and women inspired by the teachings of Buddhism and Thich Nhat Hanh, a contemporary Vietnamese Zen Master, peace activist, and writer.

The mission of the Community is to nurture mindfulness, love, and understanding among those who participate in its activities and in the larger society. Members come together to meditate, to deepen our understanding of the practice of mindfulness, to encourage and inspire each other through dharma discussions and mindful actions, to support each other through difficult times and to celebrate the joys and wonders of life. Recognizing that each person's peace and happiness are interwoven with the peace and happiness of others, the WMC offers activities that welcome the children, families, and companions of members. The Community also organizes retreats, lectures, and other public events; supports communities and causes in accord with the Community's mission; and works with groups that relieve suffering through compassionate actions.

"When we say, 'I take refuge in the sangha,' it means we put our trust in a community of fellow practitioners who are solid. A teacher can be important and also the teachings, but friends are the most essential element of the practice. It is difficult or even impossible to practice without a sangha."

From *Touching Peace* by Thich Nhat Hanh.

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Newsletter layout: Joseph Byrne <josephb@quixote.org>

Please get in touch with us with your comments about the newsletter and any information you would like included. Masthead design and graphics provided by Cindy Sherwood, 301-774-3051. Printing services provided by Community Printing, 202-726-4017.

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If you would like to be added to the **WMC mailing list**, please send your name, address, and phone number, along with a check for \$5 to cover each year's mailing costs, to The Washington Mindfulness Community, at PO Box 11168 Takoma Park, MD 20913. (Checks payable to the "Washington Mindfulness Community".)

Brief reports from WMC committees (November 19)

Notes by Carolyn Bluemle

Library Committee: The inventory of the books has been completed. The purchase of a new book cabinet is being discussed. If there are particular books members believe should be in the library, they should let the committee know. Jindra is giving the audio tapes of Thay's talks at the California Retreat to the WMC library.

Community Care Committee: The social gathering for the second half of the Sunday sittings on the last Sunday of the month, which is also New Comers Night, is appreciated by members. This social practice will now be a part of the WMC practices. Second Body Practice will be inaugurated in February (see p. 6)

Communications Committee: Members of the committee have discussed whether or not to have the WMC webpage linked to other non-Thich Nhat Hanh Buddhist webpages. The general feeling of the committee was to keep links to the WMC page only of groups and organizations associated with the Thay's tradition, and to include other links on a "Other Resources" subpage. Other issues, such as the WMC webpage and newsletter, will be discussed at the next committee meeting, on February 4.

The Board of Trustees of the WMC met on Monday, December 18, 2000 to decide the 2001 fiscal budget, and discuss some related issues. This budget is meant to serve as a guideline according to the state of our resources, both financial and organizational, at the end of this year.

As of 15 December 2000, the WMC had \$6,154.54 in the bank. It is estimated that the WMC will receive approximately \$1,000 in donations from individuals in 2001. The following money will be offered from the WMC as donations:

- * \$1,500 to the Washington Buddhist Vihara
- * \$1,000 to Maple Forest Monastery, for year 2000
- * \$1,000 to Maple Forest Monastery, for year 2001

The following will be made available to committees in 2001:

Communications Committee:

- * \$800 for newsletters, printing and postage
- * \$64 for mailbox fee
- * \$300 for telephone service and new installation

Operations Committee:

- * \$2,475 for Charter Hall for WMC Family & Friends Retreats (expected to be reimbursed by retreat attendees)
- * \$300 for purchasing books and tapes for the WMC library
- * \$200 for a second cabinet

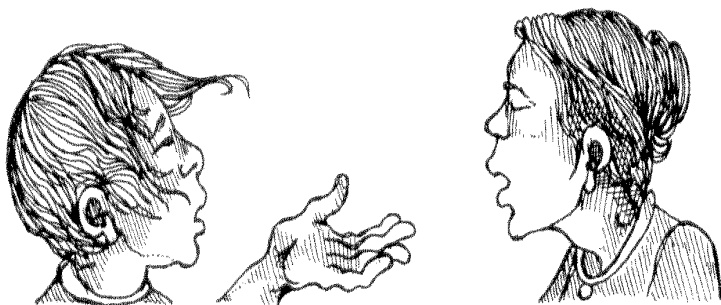
The following issues are noted:

1. Due to rising prices at Charter Hall, the cost of attending the WMC Family & Friends Retreats has been raised for the first time to \$50.00 per adult (from \$40.00) and \$25.00 per child (from \$20.00) plus food.
2. The Practice Council recommended to the Board that the availability of scholarships for those wanting to attend retreats, lectures, classes, etc. be rejuvenated. Both the Committee and the Board agree that in 2001, specific fund raising efforts will be dedicated to raising money for this purpose.

Notes from the WMC Community Gathering

Consensus decision-making

The second WMC community gathering, on November 19, 2000, opened with a stimulating and informative presentation on the Quaker process of decision-making using consensus by Gary Gillespie from the Homewood Friends Meeting and the American Friends Service Committee in Baltimore. Gary said that consensus-making is part of the Practice. It is meeting yourself and others face-to-face. It is deep speaking, listening, and looking. It is getting to know members and the place of the group on a particular issue. It is about building relationships, understanding, insight, skillful means, and coming to a decision, a conclusion as a group. It is about individual



and group transformation.

The consensus-making process begins with a designated clerk, reporter, or facilitator presenting a statement on a subject or issue for group action. For example, do we buy a copier machine, or how do we stop the bombing in Iraq? The facilitator might also provide an introduction or orientation especially for new members, read the minutes of the last meeting, and present a meeting agenda. To be heard is to be empowered; it is to go beyond the self. Everyone is asked to speak and be listened to. One person speaks at a time. Minority opinions are paid particular attention. The quality of listening can be evaluated. If a member is repetitive, cutting off other speakers, or over-speaking, it can be pointed out that they may not be listening well. To help to listen deeply listeners might ask speakers if they heard them correctly and state what they believe they heard them say.

Highly emotional or strong conflict conversations are addressed with silence. At any time silence may be called to bring insight and harmony whenever necessary. If new members raise issues that were addressed in previous meetings, as appropriate they can be asked to meet

after the consensus meeting to bring them up-to-date.

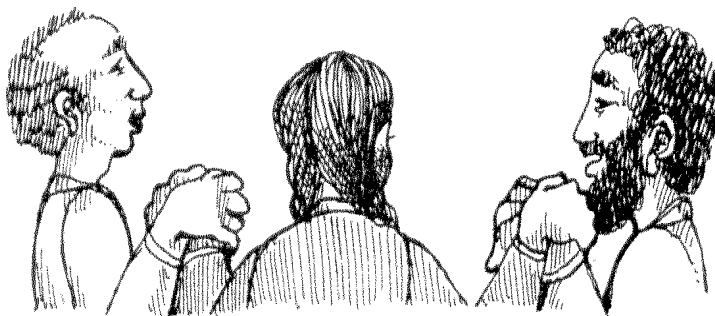
Unity or harmony of the community is an important component of the process. Each person has the responsibility of finding ways for the group and themselves to obtain consensus. If you honestly can't agree with the group, you state you are standing aside with your opinion so the group can arrive at a consensus.

If there is an obstructionist or disrupter in the meeting, the facilitator informs them that the group must move on and that their concerns will need to be addressed outside of the meeting. The group and the facilitator will know after some time has passed when it is appropriate to have the concerns of these participants put to the side so the group can move forward.

Consensus making has been used and is being used by the American Friends Service Committee in international situations with success. For example, it was used in the anti-landmines movement that started in Canada. The books: *Beyond Majority Rule*, written by Jesuit Priest, which explains Quaker consensus making, and *The Mind of Clover* by Robert Aitken were recommended readings on the consensus-making process.

Community Social Time

Participants gave very positive feedback regarding the experiment of having social time for the second half of the evening of sitting meditation on the last Sunday of each month. It was decided to make this social time an ongoing practice. New members said that it gave them a chance to meet the community and to get a sense of it. As the last Sunday of December will be New Year's Eve, it was decided to devote the evening meditation to a social celebration, welcoming families and friends and having a tea ceremony. The celebration of New Year's midnight hour would be at the "WMC midnight" hour of 9:00 p.m.



In Gratitude, cont. from p. 1

with everything around us. By thanking someone or something, I re-connect with it. When I bow, I send out my appreciation from my heart and receive the gifts of the earth and its creatures in my heart. When I bow to the Buddha, I bow to my ability to laugh at myself humbly and come back to the gifts of the present moment. It is this understanding that has transformed the way that I live, such that I feel tremendous joy, and love and appreciation for all creatures.



The "Ohana Thriver Sangha"

by Jindra Cekan

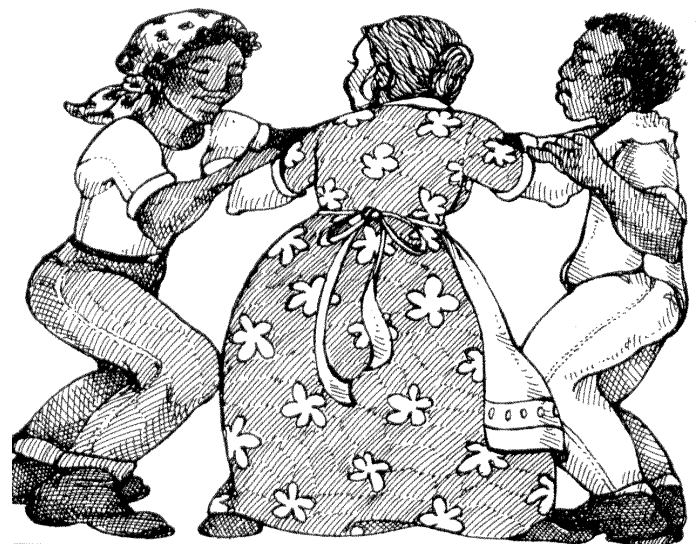
In September of this year I had the privilege of attending Thay's retreat in southern California. When registering, I decided to attend a specialized sangha group, "Survivors of Abuse" – those who had experienced physical, mental and/or emotional abuse. While I did this with some trepidation, it was one of the most transformative experiences of my meditative life. There was much shared and illuminated, all of it in a 'safe space' led by two long-standing practitioners. Here are a few ways in which people used the practice to heal long deep wounds:

- One person had great difficulty in following Thay's instruction to 'look at your hand and see your ancestors' as they had been nearly fatally abused by their mother. Yet they could actually touch this practice when they realized that this same hand which 'held' their mother was also able to lovingly touch their child.
- A second person used the practice to bring healing to the child they had been when they – and most of their siblings – had been physically abused by a family member over many years. In their mind's eye, they went home and back to themselves as children. As they went back in time, they returned to each of the children's rooms when each were asleep and whispered "hang in there – in another 20 years you will be fine, happy and beyond this pain." This practice put an end to bad migraines.
- One person who had always had difficulty smiling used Thay's observation that smiling relaxes muscles and therefore one's body, which transformed what had been a cynical and hurtful practice in their family into a healing one for themselves.

- Another realized during this retreat that while Thay's instruction of 'being in this present moment' was difficult, as many present moments in their childhood had been painful and demanded constant future planning, this moment was no longer then.
- And yet another person announced at the final tea ceremony that rather than bringing something to share or to show the others, they had 'only' brought themselves, which for the first time in their lives, was enough.

There are many stories to share, and much healing and true sangha building happened between us – we renamed ourselves the "Ohana Thriver Sangha". So much so, that the group exchanged addresses, mailed each other the group photo, and began not only an email 'egroup' but also are writing something for the *Mindfulness Bell* about this experience. It was truly remarkable.

I wanted to bring this opportunity for healing and growth to the Washington-Maryland-Virginia area in March or April. I thought possibly of using the center on Maryland's shore where family retreats are held, but I have no way to gauge interest from our extended sangha unless I wrote this article. The two facilitators are willing to come to us from NY and NC, provided that we pay for the transportation. Please contact me if you are interested in helping me organize such a 2-day retreat or if you would like to attend or know someone who might. (cekanj@usa.redcross.org; 202-546-8826 home). Namaste.



All the artwork in this edition of *Sangha News* is by **Kore Loy McWhirter** and appears in the marvelous folk songbook, *Rise Up Singing*.

Second Body Practice

by Barbara Newell

The Community Care Committee (CCC) is very happy to offer this opportunity for you to participate in Second Body practice, in which a sangha member commits to being there for his or her "second body" fellow sangha member. Based on comments we have received from the sangha and from the Practice Council, for this initial round, the practice will be as follows.

Sangha members wishing to participate should send a copy of the form below to the CCC by Sunday, February 11. Forms may be mailed to the WMC at P.O. Box 11168, Takoma Park, MD 20913; e-mailed to secondbody@aol.com; or hand-delivered to Carolyn Bluemle, Jeanine Cogan, Rob DeBara, or Barbara Newell at the Vihara. Participants will be notified of their matches around February 18.

The round will then last for 3 months. Participants are asked to be in contact with their second bodies a minimum of once a week, for approximately 15-20 minutes. This could take the form of, for example, one longer call, or four calls per week of five minutes (or more) each. Once the participant and second body have agreed upon their schedule, it will be the participant's responsibility to contact the second body. After the greeting, we suggest beginning with some silence and breathing together.

This practice is about both mindful listening and mindful speaking. We feel there is a special quality of speaking, and hearing one's self speak, while another is listening. We also value the quality of two people being together in the present moment and sharing the speaking and the silences together. Meeting in person is, of course, especially wonderful if possible.

While we strongly recommend that primary communication should be at least by phone, this is ultimately up to the participant and second body. Please check in with each other to be mindful of the ways in which the mode you are using is, or is not, working for both parties.

Participants and second bodies are asked to refrain from initiating a sexual or dating relationship with one another until after the round has been completed.

We very much encourage participants to contact members of the Practice Council or CCC with any difficulties, joys, or other comments that arise in the course of their Second Body

Practice. The March 25 and subsequent community gatherings also will be opportunities for sangha members to share their experiences with one another and discuss any modifications to the practice that may be called for.

With many thanks, and looking forward to enjoying this new practice with our dear sangha.



Contact information for Practice Council and CCC members:

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tangokali@erols.com

Jeanine Cogan
202-543-3842 (h)
jcogan5573@aol.com

Bill Menza
703-242-9136 (h)
wmenza@capaccess.org

James Figetakis
703-527-8300 x250 (w: best)
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ireneathom@aol.com

Bob Edwards
202-686-8611 (h)
EMLYN1@msn.com

Joe Toole
703-751-9309 (h)
703-235-0500 (w)
joe_toole@fhwa.dot.gov

Rob DeBara
202-364-6922 (h)
202-872-7143 (w)
RdeBara@aol.com

Name: _____
E-mail: _____

Phone Number: _____

Please state here any special conditions that will significantly affect your participation in the Second Body Practice (e.g., extended absence(s) during the 3-month period; or require matchings with women only or with men only):

Thank you!



Muddy Path

by Erica Hamilton

Muddy Path
Under my feet
is no beauty
compared to the sparkling of flowers
in the sun
or the tufts of green
bursting out of branches
of nearby trees

The hills in the distance
hued with the essence of spring
call my attention
And yet
I return to
the muddy path
in admiration
in step
with countless beings
who walked this same path
tenderly
kissing its stones, its form, its earth
with each movement of weight
upon its surface

This muddy path has seen
faces I will never meet
and days of awareness
before I was conscious
This muddy path knows
the body of each element
each harmonious wave
each limb of our collective mass

This muddy path
Still;
echoes the wisdom of ancient stones and
supports my weight
with the rhythmic shining
of eternal souls

Harvest

by Bill Menza

It's time to harvest
All the wonders
In and near you.
That you are alive,
You can see,
And walk.
That you have enough to eat,
Have sunrises and sunsets.
Have medical care.
A decent job.
Have family and friends.
That you can be grateful
For these and so much more.
It's harvest time.

April 14, 1999, Montreal, Canada

My Sunset

by Richard Brady

In 1996, the meditation hall of Plum Village's New Hamlet was a beautiful old stone barn. During that summer opening the eighty New Hamlet residents sat on cushions forming two large rectangles and two smaller triangles. One evening as I was about to take a seat for the first meditation period, I glanced out the western window I was facing. Outside I saw the sun just beginning to set over the rolling hills. The sunsets I have witnessed during visits to Plum Village are among the most glorious I have encountered. So, it was with some anticipation that I began meditating. In fact, I could not refrain from glancing up a couple of times before the large bell signaled us to uncross our legs. By that time the sunset had progressed, but I would need to wait until the round of walking meditation was over to see its full splendor. Returning to my cushion after walking around my triangle, I stood facing the center of the hall, my back to the west window and what I was certain was a spectacular sunset. Soon, I thought, the small bell will sound, and I will turn around and see my sunset. However, I was mistaken. The rectangles were considerably larger than my triangle, and people walked around them very mindfully and very slowly. Behind me my sunset was happening. Suddenly, as I stood watching the figures moving slowly in the shadows of twilight, everything shifted. Before me was my whole, wonderful New Hamlet Sangha, standing beautifully, gliding gracefully. I felt my love for them, my deep connection to them. Here was a sunset more beautiful than any I had heretofore experienced, and I was part of it. Finally the small bell sounded. I bowed deeply and sat once again on my cushion without looking out of the window. I had seen my sunset.

"Striving to attain quietness leads nowhere. It is like putting a paper bag over a cat's head: it will walk backward but will never be able to advance."

Nyogen Sensaki-Sensei

WMC CALENDAR

WMC Meditation and Dharma Discussion: every Sunday evening at 7-9:15 PM, at the Buddhist Vihara at 5017 16th Street, N.W. in Washington, D.C. Sitting and walking meditation and a brief taped dharma talk by Thich Nhat Hanh are followed by a discussion. Everyone is welcome.

<www.mindfulnessdc.org>

WMC Newcomer Orientation and Social Time: Last Sunday each month. The new members orientation is a time to ask questions about sitting and walking meditation, bells, gathas and other aspects of Mindfulness practice. Open to all, but especially for newcomers. We will meet from 6 to 7 PM before the regular sitting. Informal orientations can be arranged for other Sundays, call or email to arrange. On the newcomers nights, we will have the usual practices all shortened starting as usual at 7 but ending at 8:15 so that we may have an hour of social time downstairs with tea and cookies afterward.

Mindfulness Practice Center in Oakton, VA: Morning Sitting & Walking Meditation: Monday to Friday 8:15-9:15 a.m. Noon meditation: Thursday, 12-12:45 p.m. Afternoon Deep Relaxation/Stress Releasing: Thursday 3:30-4:15 p.m., Mindful Movement: Tuesday & Thursday, 4:15-5 p.m. Children's Program: Monday 4:00-4:45 p.m. Thursday Evening Meditation: Thursday 7:30-9:00 p.m. Please call 703-938-1377 to confirm. <www.plumvillage.org/mpcf>

Stillwater Mindfulness Practice Center: Sitting meditation and reading every Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings from 6:30 am to 7:30 am; sitting meditation and other mindfulness practices Wednesday evenings, 7:30 p.m.. All at Crossings in Takoma Park, MD.
<www.stillwatermpc.org>

Also, twelve-week workshops on **Introduction to Mindfulness** and **Mindfulness at Work** are offered each year on Thursday evenings by the Still Water Mindfulness Practice Center. We also regularly sponsor or cosponsor other workshops, classes, retreats, and special events. Interested persons may join the email list and receive a weekly update of activities by sending contact information to Mitchell Ratner at 301-270-8353, or email him at: info@StillwaterMPC.org

Capitol Hill Mindfulness Practice: Every Wednesday evening from 6:15 to 7:15 p.m. at the Dancing Heart Yoga Center, 221 5th St., NE, Washington, DC (just off Stanton Square near Mass Ave.). Contact: Jim & Freddie Schrider, 202-544-0841 or <jshrider@igc.org>

Annapolis Mindfulness Practice: Thursdays, 7-8:30 p.m. Unitarian Universalist Church of Annapolis, 333 Dubois Rd. Contact: Art Hanson, 410-216-9551.

Columbia Mindfulness Practice: First Monday of month, 7-8:30 p.m. Contact: Judy Colligan, 410-730-4712.

Bethesda Mindfulness Practice: Tuesdays & Thursdays, 7-8 a.m. For directions and more info, call: 301-897-3648.

Arlington Mindfulness Practice: Every first and third Sunday of the month at 7 p.m. Sitting meditation, singing and outside walking meditation (weather permitting). In February, at 4907 S. 29th Rd, #B2 (Holly Berman, 703-671-9152). In March, at 4309 S. 35th Street (Peter Guerrero, 703-820-1524).

Baltimore Fresh Breeze Mindfulness Sangha: Meets in Towson, MD, from 8:30 - 10:15 a.m., Saturday mornings. Contact: Carol Fegan, 410-583-7798.

Being Peace: Days of Mindfulness with Anh-Huong and Thu Nguyen. We come together once a month to learn and practice the art of mindful living as a community. Join us at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Fairfax, 2709 Hunter Mill Road, Oakton, Virginia. Space is limited so call now at 703-938-1377. Suggested donation is \$30 to \$50.
Upcoming dates: February 24, March 17.

Mindfulness Days with the Boat of Compassion (Thuyen Tu), Vietnamese zen group practice in the tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh: First Saturday most months, at the Buddhist Congregational Church of America, 5401 16th St. NW, Washington, DC. Meditation from 10 a.m. - noon; vegetarian lunch afterwards. To confirm, contact Anh-Huong Nguyen: 703-938-9606, Que Tran: 301-589-8234, or Vien Nguyen: 301-294-7966.

August 13 - 18, 2001

@ University of Massachusetts at Amherst

Supporting the Practice of Peace and Nonviolence in Family, School, and the Workplace: A retreat with Thich Nhat Hanh and the monks and nuns from Plum Village, Maple Forest Monastery, and Deer Park Monastery.

For reservations and information, please contact Green Mountain Dharma Center, Tel.: (802)436-1103, Fax: (802)436-1101, or Email: mfmaster@vermontel.net.