

Washington
Mindfulness
Community

Sangha Reflections

December 2001

Newsletter of the Washington Mindfulness Community

A Couple of Steps With Some Hopeful Travelers

Journal entry by Mary Hillebrand
Saturday, November 17, 2001

“Peace be to you,
and peace be to your heart,
and peace, oh peace
be to all the world.”

This is the simple song I sang this evening with a small group of people who walked from various places between New York and D.C., down to the Lincoln Memorial, where I met them. Some of them started way up in New York, carrying a flame that began at the rubble of the World Trade Center and would finish its journey at the burned out hole in the side of the Pentagon.

The tune of the song is so simple and beautiful. Will I remember it years from now, when I look back and read this passage? Perhaps not. But for this moment, right now, as I sit at a beautiful, fall-decorated table and eat hot food by candlelight an hour after leaving them, the song is in my head and my heart. At this moment, the song helps me hold onto the energy and love of that peace gathering.

It was a pretty small group — maybe 30 people or so. When I’ve heard about gatherings like this lately, I’ve imagined larger groups — I guess it’s the idealist in me imagining that, thinking, “How could such a positive effort not attract hundreds?” I’m not disappointed though, when I see the smaller groups that do gather. I’m grateful that those people came out that day and hopeful they’ll carry the spirit of peace shared in that event with them to others they know.

After the walkers formed a circle near the reflecting pool in front of the Lincoln Memorial, we all lit candles from the lantern they had carried down from New York. We had an eight-minute silent meditation there — eight minutes for infinity, whose symbol is 8 on its side. I sat down on the cold cobblestone terrace with my candle and felt the stone under my butt and legs and feet and felt connected to the Earth. I looked around the circle at the candlelit faces of the walkers, some with tears in their eyes and many with peaceful half-

smiles on their lips, and I felt connected to the world. I looked up to the sky to the left of the Lincoln Memorial and saw the crescent moon hanging very low in the night sky, and I felt the heat of the candle under my chin, and I felt blessed.

When the circle was done, we each walked with our candles past each other in the circle, giving silent “eye hugs” of peace and love to each as we slowly walked by. Some of these walkers, all ages, male and female, mostly Caucasian, and many weather-beaten and a bit scraggly-looking, held my gaze so intensely it felt as if we were talking without sound. From one guy, I saw “We can do this, you and me!” in his eyes. To a woman my eyes said, “Thank you.” It was beautiful and made me smile and smile.

Then we walked silently toward the Vietnam Memorial, planning to walk past it with our candles and peace flags and the yellow banner that says “May Peace Prevail on Earth.”

The park service stopped us and, noting they had given us some slack to hold a demonstration without a permit, said we couldn’t bring candles or banners to the wall. So when everyone had finished their “eye hugs”

and reached that stopping point, we listened as one of the leaders helped us transfer our candle flames to our hearts.

At that moment, I stared down at my little white candle, with its little paper wax catcher, and felt how important it had become to me in those 15 minutes or so that I had held it. My grip on its stubby end was so tight! So I loosened it, letting the



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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.

Sangha Reflections is published by the Washington Mindfulness Community, P. O. Box 11168, Takoma Park, MD 20913. 301-681-1036. **Email & web addresses: wmc@mindfulnessdc.org; www.mindfulnessdc.org**

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".)

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Masthead design and graphics provided by Cindy Sherwood. Printing services provided by Community Printing, 202-726-4017.

Notes from the Community Gathering, October 28

Those present: Jim Schrider, Erica Hamilton, Barbara Newell, Bill Menza, Carolyn Bluemle, Irene D'Auria, Steve Sidley, Jeanine Cogan, Colleen Corrigan.

1. Discussion of Second Body practice

It was noted that there is a problem with people signing up for the practice, and then being unavailable to their second bodies once the practice period begins. Some of these people have then signed up a second time for second body practice, only to be unavailable again.

It was proposed that Joe Toole would act as a "troubleshooter" when this situation arose. The person or persons affected will contact Joe, and Joe will ask how that person had addressed the problem, talk about possible approaches, and leave it to that person to take the next step. Joe would then check in some time later to ask what the results were in the person's effort to reach their unavailable second body. If it was still a problem, Joe would try to reach the unavailable person to see what the problem was. He would also make sure this person was not included in the pool of people for the next round, if the situation had not been resolved.

A number of people wondered if the roles in second body practice were understood well enough. Perhaps they signed up not really knowing what their responsibilities were. Yet others noted that it was pretty clearly communicated at the beginning of the present round to make sure that people did not sign up unless they were definitely available.

It was suggested that there be some sort of informational clearinghouse. It was further suggested that information about second body practice be put up on the web page so that folks could access it at any time if they had questions. Joseph Byrne suggested this information be forwarded to him so he could put it on the WMC web page. It was also suggested that an article on second body practice be put in the next newsletter.

2. The Resolution for a Moratorium on the Death Penalty

Bill Menza presented the latest version of the moratorium resolution, which was originally brought to the community by Joseph Byrne. Bill outlined the changes to the original resolution; Joseph gave some background. Joseph noted that the original resolution was part of a campaign to gather resolutions, which is now concluded. He asked Bill what the current uses for such a resolution would be. Bill said that organizations he works with in Virginia have taken up the campaign to gather organizational resolutions calling for a moratorium on executions.

Bill presented some questions that a sangha member raised about the resolution being "too political." Bill replied to these concerns by saying that the criminal justice system needs to be criticized and reformed, and that the death penalty was inescapably political. He also said that the "political" information in the resolution was there to help educate those considering passing it. Someone else noted that to speak out against injustice is part of engaged Buddhism, and is one of the 14 precepts.

It was then put to the group: do we feel strongly enough about this issue to pass a resolution, at the same time setting a

Give the gift that keeps giving (or the Dana that keeps doing!)

In this year that has been unprecedented in adversity but also in generosity, and in this season of giving, the Washington Mindfulness Community asks that you consider making a donation to support mindful practice in the DC area.

In particular, we are making a holiday fund-raising push to build up the **WMC Scholarship Fund**, which enables those without means to travel and participate in retreats with Thich Nhat Hanh, and other dharma teachers. Please consider sending us a check to support this effort.

You might also want to consider supporting the **Washington Buddhist Vihara** at this holiday time. The Vihara has been the host of the WMC for seven years now and allows us to use their space for meditation and social gatherings, at no charge. The periodic donations from the WMC, and from WMC members, to the Vihara comprises an important part of their yearly budget.

Please note that now that the WMC has been granted full non-profit church status from the IRS, your gifts to the WMC are completely tax-deductible. If you need an acknowledgement, please include a note to that effect with your donation.

An envelope has been included with this newsletter for your convenience, along with a "return card." Please include this card with your check or money-order, and be sure to check one of the boxes, so we might know whether you'd like your donation to go to the WMC Scholarship Fund, WMC General Funds, and the Washington Buddhist Vihara.

Thank you for your generosity and have a happy, peaceful holiday.



Rita Corbin



Rita Corbin

New: Committee on Mindful Politics

Recently the board of the WMC approved a Committee on Mindful Politics. The CMP was started by a WMC group on Capitol Hill early this year at the suggestion of Carolyn Cleveland, upon her return from a two-month stay at Plum Village where she had asked Thich Nhat Hanh for some suggestions on how to influence lawmakers to become more mindful in the important work they do. As a result she invited a few interested friends from the Capitol Hill Mindfulness Community to discuss next steps.

From that small beginning a special committee was formed and approved by WMC, Mindfulness Walks around the Capitol were organized, a "love letter" to congress members was distributed, contacts were made with an important group called the Faith and Politics Institute, and visits to various congressional offices took place to discuss how the group might assist officials and staff in doing their work more mindfully in the midst of numerous pressures and deadlines.

The words of Thich Nhat Hanh to Carolyn at Plum Village were these: "A spiritual dimension [in a Congress person's work] is very important, because now we are living in a time when fear is dominating, we do not know exactly where we are going, and so we are afraid of making big mistakes that will destroy us. This is why a spiritual dimension is very important. A sangha can seek the sponsorship of a number of Congress members to suggest the idea to Congress to share and talk about the [mindfulness] practice. A spiritual dimension is needed to enhance the quality of work Congress is doing."

The group will be looking for other practitioners to join its efforts and gradually find even better ways to promote mindfulness practice within the political community of Washington. It is a big task but needed so very much.

For more information or to indicate your interest in working with the committee please contact Carolyn at <cultivatepeace@solespring.net>.

Brakes and Lights

by Susan Hadler

I'm sitting on a brown cushion in the Meditation Hall on 16th Street for the first time and I am worried. Did I put the emergency brake on? Or is the car rolling down the hill crashing into other cars, causing havoc and destruction out in the street in front of the Vihara? I feel an urgent need to find out.

I've come back again to sit with the Sangha. I'm sitting on a brown cushion and worrying. Did I turn out the lights in the car when I parked it at the curb? I can't remember. It was twilight when I drove up. Did I even turn the lights on? I think I did. But did I turn them off? Oh dear. Maybe I should get up quietly and tip toe out to see. Then I could come in and sit peacefully like everyone else. Maybe I could just look out the window. If I've left the lights on, I won't be able to leave.

I lived with the nuns in Plum Village for a month in the spring and felt the extraordinary effects of living mindfully in community: the safety, the awareness of the beauty in every moment, wide open inner space and peace, wholeness and freedom. I saw a new way of relating and being with people, one that isn't filled with competition and self promotion. The sisters created an atmosphere of respect and listening rather than interruption and self-importance. I learned a way of working - not rushing to finish the job, but enjoying the work, the surroundings, the people, a slow way, a way of attention and simplicity.

I want to learn to live this way. I arrive at the Sangha full of hopes and fears. I want to be here, but what if I forget to put the brakes on, harming others and embarrassing myself? I want to be here, but what if this new community depletes my battery and I can't move? What will happen to me here?

At first I worry about speaking. What if I have nothing to say? Will I be seen as worthless and will I then see myself that way? Will I say the wrong thing, crash around and cause damage? It's a relief to be able to leave after the sitting. I am surprised to find that I want to stay. I want to hear Thay and I hope to find a new way of being together with people where silence and listening co-exist and where inner truths have a chance to be spoken.

What I find is almost indescribable. Whether I speak or whether I am silent, it's all right. No judgment. No one dominates. People ask for help. No one pretends to know it all. Vulnerability, tenderness, openness and truth exist here. We sing about pain and laughter. Silence surrounds each person's words. Space to listen. Space to hear. Someone smiles at me. I begin to relax and feel safe and happy.

I notice that the first things that come to mind are things that might get people to like me, things that show I'm

sensitive or smart. Then I notice that if I wait, sometimes I feel a twitch or tingle inside around my heart or in my stomach. When I speak from that place I am not shy or worried about what people will think of me. It is as if what is in me belongs to the group and is not mine alone. I am part of something more. When others speak from that place, I feel more deeply present, with them, with the Sangha and with myself. Together there is wholeness.

Listening deeply I hear wholeness sprouting and growing like a garden. What is said heals divisions inside and outside. Sitting with the Sangha is like coming back to breath, a place of safety and quiet and true being where the heart can open. I'm finding out I can leave my ego on the curb with my car and I can leave my worries at the door with my shoes.

The loving and supportive community of practice, realizing harmony, awareness, and liberation, to the Sangha I go for refuge.

A Couple of Steps

(cont. from page 1)

flat bottom of the candle rest gently between my fingers. I stared at that flame and breathed in and out the peace it represented, and my eyes filled with tears as I realized I had to blow it out. The wonder of it is that, as my eyes filled up, the flame multiplied and stretched and echoed and wavered, making a beautiful kaleidoscope of white light in the tears in my eyes. It got more beautiful the more my recognizing its significance stirred tears in me.

And I thought sadly, "I don't want to blow out this candle. I love this little flame." As the tears trickled down my cheeks, I remembered that letting go is part of loving the present moment — and I fully believed what the woman was saying about keeping the real peace flame in our hearts. I bent my head and, with an unexpectedly weak breath, blew a puff of air toward the flame. It quivered and flickered, but it didn't go out. "Ha!" I thought. "It doesn't want to leave me either!" Another, stronger puff and the flame was smoke, and I saw the darkness around me in a new way. The peace flame had jumped into my heart, and I carried it home, rollerblading up the dark road alongside the mall, singing out loud to the city,

*"Peace be to you,
and peace be to your heart,
and peace, oh peace
be to all the world!"*

"Be observant if you would have a pure heart, for something is born to you in consequence of every action."

Jelaluddin Rumi

Seeing

by Erica Hamilton

Eyes of mine
You think you know Truth?
Well, what makes you so savvy?

Your eyes and my eyes
together
may see more clearly
even if we don't sometimes see
each other so clearly

Can our eyes know
the wisdom of understanding
we see
when we see the beauty of life?

Can you see your heart
in the blooming of a rose?
the smile of a child?
the sounds of a dove's flight?
Can I see my heart in you?

Sometimes I look and look
without seeing
Deeper still I go
"Wait, what is this?" I say as
I uncover treasures I thought lost—
Feelings hiding in notions of Self

And I discover an unveiled moment
so purely
Yes
I do understand
Now
the nature of your form
meeting mine
across oceans of misperceptions
Here
This moment has no separation
Your laughter has just arose
in my heart

Smiling

by Katherine Hobbs

A demonstration of
who I aspire to be,
I show this to the world, but most of all
the act allows a transformation to occur within.
As my lips curl upwards,
it is as if instantly putting on a pair of rose colored glasses
—smiling, I touch optimism and joy.

Before long, my whole being is smiling.
Every cell in my body – my fingernails, my skin, my hair,
the souls of my feet.
As I breathe in and out, I am aware of my body smile.
Then, I feel an opening. Soon, the crevasse widens, and
emerging – a sense of ease, serenity, peace, joy, equanimity,
and light.

Continuation

by Joseph Byrne

(for Don Taylor)

there is no death, my dear,
because there is no birth

the sea of sorrow is calm;
smooth and clear as a mirror

the laughing sun dances on it;
but the moon, lost, stumbles

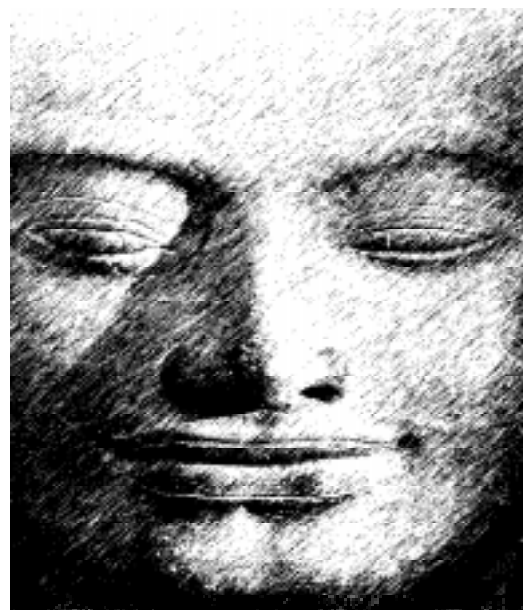
shooting stars sing in shells
as they sink to the depths

choose any star to steer by;
give each of them your name

wherever they lead, whether
they flicker or fade, whether

they died before you were even
born - follow them

shining like jewels on your brow,
they will lead you home





In Memoriam

Thay Giac Thanh
1946 - 2001

Simple, genuine, kind,
Down to earth,
Free of entanglements,
Not rushing.
So happy to be with you
In the present moment.
Not some place else with someone else.
“Flush your toilet mind,”
He would say if needed.
Free wherever he was,
Even with sickness and its pain,
Even with death.
Rest in peace gentle Zen Master.

bill menza

October 21, 2001

Oakton, Virginia

Community Gathering

(cont. from p. 2)

precedent for future resolutions? The sense of the room was strongly in favor of passing the resolution, though some felt the resolution would be stronger if there was some language that made it clear that we “heard” the suffering and pain of those who favor the death penalty. Some addressed this by taking up such issues as the death penalty having a deterrent effect, and

providing “closure” for the victims’ families, arguing that neither of these things have proven to be true. Bill then agreed to add some information to the resolution, addressing the issues of deterrence and “closure.” Someone else noted that since the resolution calls for a moratorium instead of abolition, it includes those who favor the death penalty, but who think it needs to be stopped for now.

The discussion concluded, Bill said he would add the proposed changes to the resolution and present it to the Board to vote on.

3. Experiments with Sunday night practice

The Community Care Committee had some suggestions to allow for more social time on Sunday nights. Beginning in November, an effort will be made to end dharma discussion at 9 p.m., thus allowing a half-hour for social time. This experiment will run indefinitely and we’ll see how it goes.

Another suggestion was, beginning in December (December 2), to have a pot-luck once a month, on the first Sunday of the month, starting at 5:15, at the Vihara. This would include at least 15 minutes of silent, mindful eating together. This would begin on Sunday, December 2, as a “holiday kick-off.” A reminder will be sent out on the list-serve and Irene will create a “paper announcement.”

A third suggestion was to invite local dharma teachers to give a dharma talk on Sunday night, instead of listening to a tape, especially since we will shortly have four more ordained dharma teachers in the area. These dharma talks would happen every couple months, beginning with Anh-Huong in December, if she’s available. Those at the Community Gathering agreed that these were all good suggestions. It was further suggested that it might be a good idea for the dharma teachers be invited for the pot-luck Sundays, making a richer experience for both the dharma teachers and the sangha. Someone also suggested that when dharma teachers from other cities were in town, they might be invited to give a dharma talk as well.

Finally, Carolyn Bluemle announced that she would offer guided meditation each month on Newcomers Night, from 6:30 to 6:50 p.m. Everyone in the sangha is invited.

4. Sangha discussion group

Following up on the suggestion at the last Community Gathering that the sangha have some kind of small discussion group, it was announced that the Practice Council approved the idea. The group will be limited to no more than 10, and will meet for six sessions, once every two weeks, over a three month period.

The topic for this first small group will be “Sexuality and Relationships” and the book the group will center its discussions around will be *Teachings on Love*, by Thich Nhat Hanh. Steve Sidley volunteered to organize the group, putting out the word and asking for those interested to contact him. His email address is: <stevesidley@aol.com>.

The next Community Gathering, which will also be the next WMC election (see enclosed WMC voter registration form), **will be March 3, 2002.**

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. Phone: 301-681-1036. <www.mindfulnessdc.org>

Note: New Potluck Social Evening, first Sunday of every month, 5:15 p.m. at the Vihara. For details, use contact info above.

WMC Newcomer Orientation: Last Sunday each month. The newcomers 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 p.m. before the regular sitting. Informal orientations can be arranged for other Sundays; call or email to arrange (contact info above).

WMC Retreats: Three times a year at Charter Hall, on the Chesapeake Bay. **Next retreat: Jan 25-27.** Use above email address to inquire about registration.

Mindfulness Practice Center of Fairfax (MPCF): 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>

Being Peace: Days of Mindfulness at the Mindfulness Practice Center of Fairfax (MPCF), with resident teachers Anh-Huong and Thu Nguyen. We come together once a month to learn and practice the art of mindful living as a community. 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: Jan. 19, Feb. 9, Mar. 16, Apr. 20, May 11.**

New Movement Class at the MPCF: Thu Nguyen of the MPCF will be teaching a class called "**Deep Relaxation and Healing Movements.**" The class will meet on six Wednesday evenings, from Jan 9 to Feb. 13, 2002, at

the UUC of Fairfax (address and contact info above).

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 Thursday 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 Monday evenings by the Still Water Mindfulness Practice Center. The Center also regularly sponsors or cosponsors 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: Sitting meditation every morning, Monday through Friday, from 7 to 8 a.m., at the Dancing Heart Yoga Center, 221 5th St., NE, Washington, DC (just off Stanton Square near Mass Ave.). Practice evening every Wednesday from 6:15 to 7:15 p.m. at 320 G St. NE. Contact: Jim & Freddie Schrider, 202-544-0841 or <jshrider@igc.org>

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).

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.

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