



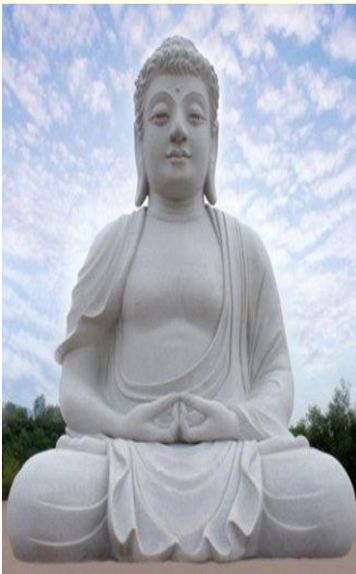
A Newsletter for the Connecticut, Florida, New York and Texas Sanghas of the Dharma Teacher Order

Texas Sangha

The new Buddha statue at Chùa Pháp Nguyên Temple, a.k.a. Dharma Spring, Temple, is 33 feet tall, making it one of the largest erect Buddha statues in North America; it was crafted in Vietnam. Read about the new Buddha statue here:

<http://blog.chron.com/sacredduty/2012/08/new-buddha-statue-has-mona-lisas-smile/#7108101=2>

Editor's Note: The hyperlinks in this newsletter are viable. Just click on them!



“This statue is a representation of Amitabha Buddha, or the Buddha of the Pure Land, who symbolizes mercy, wisdom and enlightenment. Gazing upon the statue is meant to steer devotees away from the desires of this world and towards enlightenment. Not only that, but its particular design also bridges cultures. While the statue contains some of the typical Asian stylizations mentioned above, the statue also has a distinct Western flair. ‘It is much different from typical Asian stylizations of Buddha,’ said Thầy. ”

The gate consisting of four pillars (one not entirely visible in photograph to the right) were installed in February 2015 and they are also 33 feet tall. Thầy explained there are many ways to explain the meaning but the common one is to represent The Four Noble Truths. **Texas Sangha, continued on p. 4.**



Connecticut Sangha

Michelle Hartel of the Connecticut Sangha reminds us of the wonder of mindfulness in our daily life:

Snow Magnolias

I am sitting here thinking about the passing of the two days of vacation that I just took from my job and realizing that a lot of life can be packed into two days. As always, I had great plans for these two days...and of course, did not accomplish much of anything on the list. Yet it was the best short vacation I have ever taken. Why, you might ask? Well, after thinking about it, I realize that when I let life just "happen," it does just that. All the things that really needed to get done, got done, and I was able to play games with my children, redecorate rooms with them and even read a little bit of a book.

It is such a wonderful feeling to just exist. No planning, just being. On the first day of my mini-vacation we got a foot of beautiful snow. While almost everyone was grumbling about a mid-February storm, I was noticing the snow magnolias. Snow-

magnolias are those wonderful little snow balls that sit on the tips of the branches of the dormant magnolia trees; the elusive little snowballs that only show up during a certain kind of snowstorm. They arrive with the heavy sticky snow and then only stay around for a brief time, as the sun quickly turns these snow buds into puddles in the snow banks below. I just happened to be driving around town at the precise time that the snow magnolias were in full bloom. They were beautiful! There is no way one can be lost in worry, or in their personal task lists, when these snow magnolias appear. Once you catch a glimpse of them, you just slow down. Even if only for a minute.

They provide fodder for conversation just when you think there is nothing to connect us. They also help us to put our larger issues into perspective, reminding us that life really is beautiful and that sometimes we are just clouded over with doubt and unable to see.

My wish for the world is that everyone gets the opportunity to see their own snow magnolias. Enjoy and just be.

Namaste, Michelle

Florida Sangha

Susette Cuoso, a member of the Florida Sangha, interviewed Teo Castellanos about his meditation group. Interview questions and answers follow:

1. How did you begin the group?

Teo Castellanos is an artist living in Miami who is part of the Miami sangha. He had thoughts about starting a new group after his dharma teacher ordination with the idea of helping towards the healing of suffering. However, he was reluctant due to the potential time commitment since he was in the process of producing his last solo play. He discussed it with Thich Trí Hoǎng and was encouraged by him during their interview. He told people in his performance company about meeting for the purpose of meditation practice, Teo added that he already includes meditation in their theater practices.

2. How often do you meet, and how are the meetings?

It is a small group of 1-5 people that meet weekly at Teo's home in a small zendo on Monday nights. "There is not enough room for prostrations or walking meditation," but they do chanting

New York Sangha

The New York Sangha has several members who lead meditation classes in addition to their work with DTO proper. This month we speak with Sister Sherry to talk about her inspiration and experiences with leading a meditation group.

Ida: Let me begin by thanking you for taking time out of your busy schedule for sharing your experience of the dharma in this form. It seems that no matter where we are in our relative reality these days, time is in short supply. Please tell us how your meditation ministry came into being.

Sherry: When the Dharma Teacher Order was affiliated with Chuang Yen Monastery, it supplied many of the teachers for the Monastery's Sunday dharma program which consisted of

and sitting meditation for half an hour every time they meet."

3. How does guiding meditation enrich or effect your personal practice?

"It makes me think back to the things that I've already studied in order refresh my knowledge and be more prepared." Teo explained that the process makes him learn the dharma better, and it "it is not a burden at all, instead, it provides emotional help in his practice of compassion."

4. How do you define your mediation sessions within the context of the larger sangha?

"I hope they become part of the larger sangha." Although we are a sangha in our meditations, Teo says "I don't make it a point to define it as a group. I hope they see me as a companion and helper in their practice."

5. Have you made any observations about the participants in your sessions?

Teo said that seeing the participants come back every week is one of the most rewarding things. Seeing the group make a commitment to the practice and return for meditation every week lets him know they have committed and are seeing a benefit in their own lives. ■



Editor's Note: Please know that you can increase readability of this newsletter on your computer monitor if you increase its size to 100% (or more) in the toolbar above this page. In that way, you can also see more detail in the photos.

New York Sangha, continued: meditation and dharma sharing. It was quite popular with English-speaking students eager to learn and practice Buddhism. When our

opportunity to spread the dharma. And so, we began to consider other possibilities.

Ida: How did you start? You mentioned that your meditation class has evolved over time. Tell us more.

Sherry: There was a meditation group at the Ajna Center for Health and Wellness in Croton which had disbanded.

New York Sangha, continued on p. 4.

Self-transformation

by Bhikkhu Bodhi

It is perhaps symptomatic of the "fallen" nature of the ordinary human condition that few of us pass the full extent of our lives comfortably reconciled to our natural selves. Even in the midst of prosperity and success, grinding notes of discontent trouble our days and disturbing dreams come to haunt our sleep. As long as our eyes remain coated with dust we incline to locate the cause of our discontent outside ourselves -- in spouse, neighbor or job, in implacable fate or fluky chance. But when the dust drops off and our eyes open, we soon find that the real cause lies within.

When we discover how deeply the cause of our unhappiness is lodged in the mind, the realization dawns that cosmetic changes will not be anywhere near enough, that a fundamental internal transformation is required. This desire for a transformed personality, for the emergence of a new man from the ashes of the old, is one of the perennial lures of the human heart. From ancient times it has been a potent wellspring of the spiritual quest, and even in the secular, life-affirming culture of our own cosmopolitan age this longing has not totally disappeared.

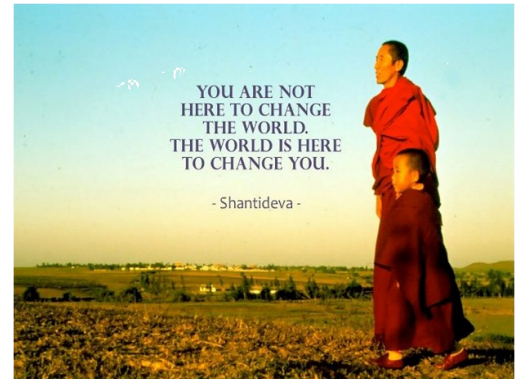
While such concepts as redemption, salvation and deliverance may no longer characterize the transformation that is sought, the urge for a radical reshaping of the personality persists as strong as ever, appearing in guises that are compatible with the secular worldview. Where previously this urge sought fulfillment in the temple, ashram and monastery, it now resorts to new venues: the office of the psychoanalyst, the weekend workshop, the panoply of newly-spawned therapies and cults. However, despite the change of scene and conceptual framework, the basic pattern remains the same. Disgruntled with the ruts of our ingrained habits, we long to exchange all that is dense and constrictive in our personalities for a new, lighter, freer mode of being.

Self-transformation is also a fundamental goal of the Buddha's teaching, an essential part of his program for liberation from suffering. The Dhamma was never intended for those who are already perfect saints. It is addressed to fallible human beings beset with all the shortcomings typical of unpolished human nature: conduct that is fickle and impulsive, minds that are tainted by greed, anger and selfishness, views that are distorted and habits that lead to harm for oneself and others. The purpose of the teaching is to transform such people -- ourselves -- into "accomplished ones": into those whose every action is pure, whose minds are calm and composed, whose wisdom has fathomed the deepest truths and whose conduct is always marked by a compassionate concern for others and for the welfare of the world.

Between these two poles of the teaching -- the flawed and knotted personality that we bring with us as raw material into the training, and the fully liberated personality that emerges in the end -- there lies a gradual process of self-transformation governed by highly specific guidelines. This transformation is effected by the twin aspects of the path: abandoning (pahana), the removal from the mind of all that is harmful and unwholesome, and development (bhavana), the cultivation of qualities that are wholesome, pure and purifying.

What distinguishes the Buddha's program for self-transformation from the multitude of other systems proposing a similar end is the contribution made by another principle with which it is invariably conjoined. This is the principle of self-transcendence, the endeavor to relinquish all attempts to establish a sense of solid personal identity. In the Buddhist training the aim of transforming the personality must be complemented by a parallel effort to overcome all identification with the elements that constitute our phenomenal being. The teaching of anatta or not-self is not so much a philosophical thesis calling for intellectual assent as a prescription for self-transcendence. It maintains that our ongoing attempt to establish a sense of identity by taking our personalities to be "I" and "mine" is in actuality a project born out of clinging, a project that at the same time lies at the root of our suffering. If, therefore, we seek to be free from suffering, we cannot stop with the transformation of the personality into some sublime and elevated mode as the final goal. What is needed, rather, is a transformation that brings about the removal of clinging, and with it, the removal of all tendencies to self-affirmation.

Self-Transformation, continued on page 5.





Third Annual Retreat at Chùa Pháp Nguyễn (Dharma Spring) in Pearland, Texas in December 2014
Ordination of new dharma teachers from the Miami, Florida sangha. Congratulations!

Texas Sangha, continued from page 1

At Dharma Spring Temple in Houston, we are working to create a Zen Park where people may come to enjoy the calm and peaceful surroundings. They enter the park through the four pillar gates which represent the Four Noble Truths. The centerpiece of the park is the large stone statue of the Buddha which stands 33' high. We also plan to build a pond 108' in diameter around the statue. Visitors may also sit on beautiful stone benches that will be placed around the park. ■

New York Sangha, continued from p. 2.

I discussed resurrecting the group with the Director of the Center who was enthusiastic. In the fall of 2013, I began teaching meditation, and it turned out that the folks who attended were very interested in learning about Buddhism and Buddhist meditation. We began to explore Buddhism together, first The Four Noble Truths, and then The Noble Eightfold Path, using Bhikkhu Bodhi's books as our texts. We no longer meet at Ajna, as it has also disbanded. Now we meet at my preschool, Children-space, every Thursday evening, from 7:30 to whenever. As with most groups, folks

New York Sangha, continued from bottom of column 1 this page.

come and go; I would say there is a loyal following of about five students. A few have had experience meditating, and some knowledge of Buddhism, others are eager to learn.

Ida: It seems that meditation is one of the widest of the many gateways to learning about the dharma. Once we become calmer, a space opens up in us that becomes a hunger to know more. I have also noticed that no matter the practitioner's level, the basics are always refreshing. So having a range in your group is not a bad thing.

Ida: What is the most important thought, you would like to share?

Sherry: Naturally, meeting every week requires a certain amount of preparation and commitment. But overall, the experience has been wonderful. I have gained confidence in my ability to share the dharma, which I really love to do. And I have had the distinct pleasure of connecting with folks who are aware, honest, open-hearted and caring.

Ida: Thank you, once again, for sharing your experience with us. We look forward to learning more in the future. Next month, maybe a visit with another meditation leader. In the meantime, "good dharma to you." ■

Self-Transformation, continued from page 3

It is important to stress this transcendent aspect of the Dhamma because, in our own time when "immanent" secular values are ascendent, the temptation is great to let this aspect drop out of sight. If we assume that the worth of a practice consists solely in its ability to yield concrete this-worldly results, we may incline to view the Dhamma simply as a means of refining and healing the divided personality, leading in the end to a renewed affirmation of our mundane selves and our situation in the world. Such an approach, however, would ignore the Buddha's insistence that all the elements of our personal existence are impermanent, unsatisfactory and not self, and his counsel that we should learn to distance ourselves from such things and ultimately to discard them.

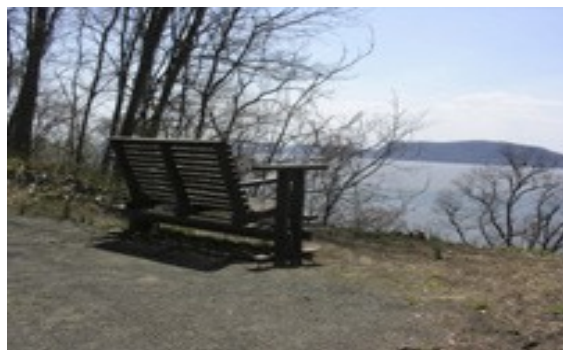
In the proper practice of the Dhamma both principles, that of self-transformation and that of self-transcendence, are equally crucial. The principle of self-transformation alone is blind, leading at best to an ennobled personality but not to a liberated one. The principle of self-transcendence alone is barren, leading to a cold ascetic withdrawal devoid of the potential for enlightenment. It is only when these two complementary principles work in harmony, blended and balanced in the course of training, that they can bridge the gap between the actual and ideal and bring to a fruitful conclusion the quest for the end of suffering.

Of the two principles, that of self-transcendence claims primacy both at the beginning of the path and at the end. For it is this principle that gives direction to the process of self-transformation, revealing the goal toward which a transformation of the personality should lead and the nature of the changes required to bring the goal within our reach. However, the Buddhist path is not a perpendicular ascent to be scaled with picks, ropes and studded boots, but a step-by-step training which unfolds in a natural progression. Thus the abrupt challenge of self-transcendence — the relinquishing of all points of attachment — is met and mastered by the gradual process of self-transformation. By moral discipline, mental purification and the development of insight, we advance by stages from our original condition of bondage to the domain of untrammelled freedom. ■

You can access all of Bhikkhu Bodhi's essays (free download) at

<http://www.vipassana.com/resources/bodhi/>

**Annual Dharma Teacher Order Three-Day Retreat will take place
April 24, 25 and 26, 2015
at Mariandale Retreat and Conference Center in Ossining, New York
Labyrinth for walking meditation**





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“Embark on the journey of Dharma study and practice...Liberate yourself and others from suffering.”

**Founder/President
Dharma Teacher Order
Ven. Dr. Thích Trí Hoằg**



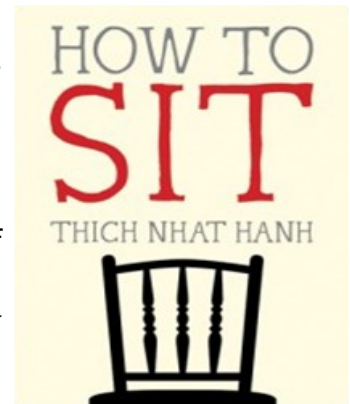
By virtue of my merits,
May all beings everywhere,
Tormented by sufferings of body and mind,
Find physical comfort and mental joy.

From the revised poem *Guide to the Buddha's Way of Life*
by 8th Century Buddhist Master, Shantideva

**Thich Nhat Hanh’s “How to Sit” adapted from book
How to Sit by Thich Nhat Hanh, published by Parallax Press.**

(reprinted with permission from Parallax Press)

- Set aside a room or corner or a cushion that you use just for sitting.
- The sound of a bell is a wonderful way to begin sitting meditation. If you don’t have a bell you can download a recording of the sound of a bell onto your phone or computer.
- When you sit, keep your spinal column quite straight, while allowing your body to be relaxed. Relax every muscle in your body, including the muscles in your face. Consider smiling slightly, a natural smile. Your smile relaxes all your facial muscles.
- Notice your breathing. As you breathe in, be aware that you are breathing in. As you breathe out, notice that you are breathing out. As soon as we pay attention to our breath, body, breath and mind come together. Every in-breath can bring joy; every out-breath can bring calm and relaxation. This is a good enough reason to sit.
- When you breathe in mindfully and joyfully, don’t worry about what your sitting looks like from the outside. Sit in such a way that you feel you have already arrived.
- It’s wonderful to have a quiet place to sit in your home or workplace. If you are able to find a cushion that fits your body well, you can sit for a long time without feeling tired. But you can practice mindful sitting wherever you are. If you ride the bus or the train to work, use your time to nourish and heal yourself.
- If you sit regularly, it will become a habit. Even the Buddha still practiced sitting every day after his enlightenment. Consider daily sitting practice to be a kind of spiritual food. Don’t deprive yourself and the world of it.



**To sit is to restore
ourselves,
to become fully present
and fully alive in the
here and now.**

Thich Nhat Hanh

Editor’s Note: If you want to see more from this book go to:

<http://www.parallax.org/how-to-sit/> and you can see a delightful illustrated slide show with excerpts from the book.