

The Dharma Teacher Order Newsletter

Vol. 2 Issue 3

April 2016

News from the Pearland, Texas Sangha

"Mindful Lawyering" by Sondra Kaighen

This January, I was invited to be on a panel with two other alumnus/lawyers to speak to 3rd year students at South Texas College of Law. The class was called "Mindful Lawyering" and the Professor wanted the students to hear our experiences and how mindfulness was utilized in our differing practices. Two of us were litigators and had many stories regarding how looking and listening deeply had served us in our practice. The other attorney was a transactional lawyer who utilized her yoga/meditation practice to assist her have better relationships with the other attorneys within her Firm.

When I first received the invitation, I was somewhat reluctant to attend, as I had visited with the Professor before, and knew she did not have any training save and except for an 8-week on-line meditation class, and I was fearful that what I would bring to the discussion may be too "Buddhism-focused," which may not be what she was looking for. However, by the time the class time came, I learned that the Professor had taken the time in between to attend a Vipassana 10-day silent retreat, and had discovered

much more about the practice and its varied usage in our profession. She did caution us to maintain a secular approach, so as to not suffer the reactions from the Board, who were reluctant to offer the class to begin with.

Needless to say, the class was a huge success and the students swarmed me afterwards for my contact information to discuss "the practice" more deeply. I was happy to hear how well received we were and encouraged to hear that there were other practicing lawyers that had found how meditation and the practice of mindfulness could help them in their professional practice. While other regions may see this and wonder "what's the big deal, of course this is useful stuff!?" but understand that here in the "Bible Belt," Buddhism, meditation and mindfulness



are foreign concepts and are generally seen as not ecumenical and therefore unworthy for public consumption. I am now hopeful that these young people will ignite the practice of mindfulness in their own lives, professionally and personally, and help other Texans see the benefits.

Teaser

I just learned that Bhikkhu Bodhi is scheduling time to come to the Houston Zen Center in November for the Buddhist Global Relief Walk for the Hungry in November, 2016. There are even rumors that he will also be scheduling some Dharma talks while here....we are very excited!

Visits to Temples in Texas

by Catharine Hill of the Pearland, TX Sangha



Happy New Year!

The Vietnamese New Year, celebrated over a period of several weeks, is one of the most important holidays in the Vietnamese culture. Thay says that it is like a collective birthday, Christmas, and New Year celebration

rolled into one! The people believe that by starting off the new year with lots of positive energy, the outcome will be positive.

ing hospitality to all. Indeed, we made new friends as we paid our respects to the Buddha and wished each other well. We were warmly welcomed everywhere we went,



Every year, as part of the celebration of the Vietnamese New Year, members of our temple make a pilgrimage to ten different Buddhist temples. Why a pilgrimage? It is reminiscent of the 53 pilgrimages in the Avatamsake Sutra. Why ten temples?? Thay says that ten is a full number, and also represents the Ten Directions. We generate positive energy by paying respect to the Buddha in each temple, which is one way to transform our negative karma. We become acquainted with different traditions and we forge friendships; we practice generosity by making a donation to each temple.



and were offered refreshments, small gifts, and even informative books and pamphlets by our brothers and sisters in the Dharma.

Alex, Kyle, Joseph and I were so happy to have this opportunity to participate in this pilgrimage and to join with the Vietnamese community in generating the positive energy that will help to make this year a happy and prosperous one for all. Happy New Year!

On Sunday, February 28, fifty members of the Dharma Spring Buddhist Center (Phap Nguyen) congregation boarded a bus at 4:30 a.m. and traveled three hours to visit ten temples in and around the city of Austin, Texas. Four of us from the DTO class were able to join the group on the pilgrimage this year, and it was a wonderful experience. It was so interesting to visit Chinese, Vietnamese, and Thai temples from both the Theravada and Mahayana traditions. Some were large and well established temples, and some were smaller establishments, just beginning to grow. All were sharing the Dharma and offer-



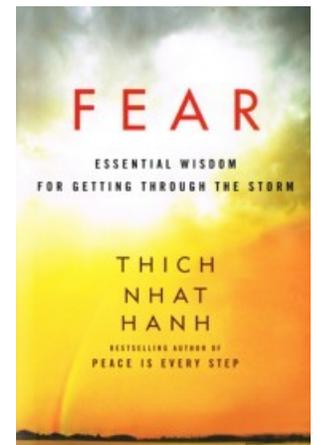
News from Karuna Zen in Miami, FL

“First Mindfulness Day” by Susette Cuoso

We recently held the first Mindfulness Day at our new center. We had 5 members in attendance for the retreat. It started at 9am and went through 4pm. We meditated with prostrations and walking meditation every 30 minutes. Around noon, we enjoyed a wonderful vegetarian feast in silence and gratefulness. After lunch, everyone pitched in to clean the center and we vacuumed and cleaned the floor, the bathroom and the kitchenette. Following the work, we rested in silence for about an

hour so we could resume meditation for the following 2 hours while Noble held private interviews. After the interviews, Noble guided us in Tai Chi exercises and we ended the retreat with a Chinese tea ceremony and a dharma discussion between the members of the group. Oftentimes, we get caught up in the hurried pace of our lives and can get lost in delusion. Practice like this with the sangha for a whole day brings us back to our bodies and our-

selves. For me, the day was renewing and Thich Nhat Hanh in his book *Fear: Essential Wisdom for Getting Through the Storm*, expressed the feeling of togetherness we can get from a day like that: "We have to learn to see the sangha, our community of spiritual support, as our own body. We need each other in order to practice solidity, freedom, and compassion so that we can remind each other that there's always hope."



News from the New York Sangha

by Elena Bravocruz interviewing Jeff Kessler

Farewells, departures, endings, pauses, and transitions are all events bound to happen at any given time. They are the inescapable dynamics of life that make living meaningful. Some changes can leave one gasping for air while others bring happiness and joy. The Buddhist doctrine teaches that changes, whether good or bad, bear within, simultaneously, positive and negative seeds that should be viewed as opportunities to grow one's understanding of impermanence. The experience of the Dharma Teacher Order (DTO), whose transitions have impacted its members in different ways and depths, is a good example of Impermanence.

Elena: You had some experience practicing meditation for a while before you came to the DTO. Once you came out, what made you stay?

Jeff: At least 5 to 10 years on and off. And I read about the program in a local newspaper and I just came out. What made me stay? A few things made me stay. One is obviously, you get to know a group of people and they become kind of like family or friends. The Monastery was great and I treasured the discussions. Meditation is great. Zen Mountain is very formal and very Japanese, and is all great and I liked it; but very rarely, especially nowadays, no one really bothers to have the discussion on what I call the big topics and, I look at what we do on Saturday, yes we do a little bit of meditation, which is great but I always liked that it is a place where we could sit and talk about interesting things.

Elena: What's your idea of the future New York Sangha?

Jeff: I think over the next few years we will find the ground to plant our feet in the Dharma but I think it will take exploration. Considering the changes that we've gone through we've done an admirable job at keeping it together and people showing up. Many groups would probably have disbanded with the changes that we've had. I have confidence that there is desire and commitment; and there are enough people who are very dedicated and always serve as a core. I think it is just a matter of really figuring out two things: one is what is going to be our emphasis. Of the different dimension we can go in, what is the thing the group will stress and two, is getting the word out. I think the core group is cohesive and resilient. I think we've learned impermanence and transience quite a bit and there is a strength that comes out of that. I think transience and impermanence should not be taken as an excuse to say we're going to do whatever; and, come what may, we'll do whatever we want. I think we still need to plan and still need to guide the program along. People have to give their time, I'd like to see if we can use technology and bring in Thay a bit more, not just to the retreat once a year but have a closer connection with him. We are cohesive and coherent and I think we understand impermanence. We have been schooled well in that regard and we are not brittle. We can take the hits when they come!

Elena: Jeff thank you very much for sharing your experiences with Impermanence and the DTO. This was a great experience for me as well; I think your insight will inspire us to continue to grow and deepen our understanding the Impermanence is about the only permanent thing we have in our lives. **(More from Jeff in the DTO Newsletter Summer Edition)**



A Letter from Justin Lee of the Pearland, TX Sangha Facilitated by Dilys Davis

Editor's Note:

As some of you will remember, Justin is an incarcerated member of the Pearland, Texas sangha who has little opportunity to share his thoughts with his fellow sangha members. For that reason, They has requested that we publish this letter from Justin.

Happy Today

By Justin Lee

We do not need to feel sad or depressed during the holiday season. Yes, we are in prison but we can choose not to imprison ourselves within the confines of tradition. We can embrace the pure spirit of these 'Holy Days' and let go of our attachment to form.

First let's recognize that these dates we celebrate are largely arbitrary. Did the pilgrims really feast on Thursday? Was Jesus even born in the winter? What if the Romans began their solar year in July instead of January?

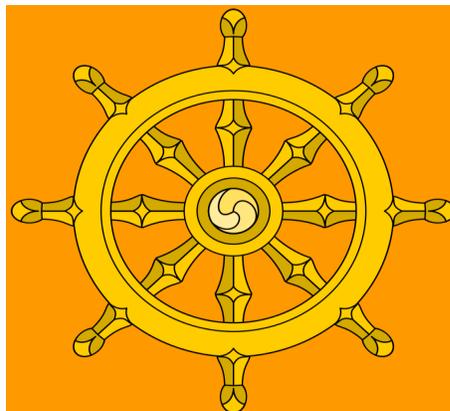
Second, let's recognize that our traditions and customs have nothing to do with the deepest meaning of these holidays; they are superficial forms.

We do not need cranberry sauce or pumpkin pie to feel gratitude. We do not need fireworks or champagne to celebrate starting anew. We can therefore let go of our attachment to these traditions. They are superficial forms.

Today is a precious day. If you take a moment to reflect on what you are grateful for, then today is Thanksgiving. Find an opportunity to be generous, then today is Christmas. Recommit yourself to personal transformation, then today is New Years. This isn't mental trickery to overcome the holiday blues. This is looking deeply beneath the surface, into the heart of reality.

Dear Dharma brothers and sisters, please join me in celebrating the greatest day of all —

Happy Today!



“The Five Remembrances” from The Mindfulness Bell Magazine

Surrender and a Lotus Posted on December 22, 2015 by Sandra Duban

By Ian Prattis (This article reprinted with permission given to the Editor of the Dharma Teacher Order Newsletter.)

After Thay’s “Heart of the Buddha” retreat in the fall of 1996 at Plum Village, I went to India to teach and train in Siddha Samadhi Yoga, a system of meditation for adults and children. Committed to global religious harmony, program participants work to heal and transform deeply rooted schisms in Indian society—through rural development, civic responsibility, and anticorruption programs. and through praying regularly with all the religious communities in India. It also has a marvelous outreach to introduce meditation into schools, training colleges, universities, and factories. I was privileged and honored to experience so many treasures of India.

Then, in November and December of 1996, I became seriously ill in India. As I observed my body’s systems crashing one by one, I knew there was a distinct possibility of death. I was surprised by my calm and lack of panic. As December drew towards its close, I totally surrendered. I will always remember Saturday, December 21, 1996. On that day, I let go of all attachments to my body. Throughout the day and evening, I read *The Blooming of a Lotus* by Thich Nhat Hanh, from cover to cover, practicing those meditations that spoke to me. I felt at one with all my spiritual ancestors. I felt Thay’s wisdom, love, and gentleness as a tangible presence. I was in a small ashram in the city of Mumbai, reserved for saints and holy men, and I also felt their grace close at hand.

The meditations in *The Blooming of A Lotus* took me deeply into my roots of being, and I felt very calm about the impermanence of my bodily existence. My heart opened wide. While I did the meditations on “Looking Deeply and Healing,” I thought about my many mistakes, and chose not to deny them or brush aside the bodily pain in this moment, for I knew that the experiences of joy and freedom that were flooding through me were dissolving both. I felt very simple, that I was living properly. I was without panic and present with whatever arose. I did not fear death. This lack of fear gave me freedom and strength, and opened a huge door to send love and joy to all. I felt my true self, peaceful, not pulled in any direction. Despite all that was going on, I was solidly and timelessly present. I could freely share whatever gifts, skills and energies I had. I finally understood the real significance of the Buddha’s words about the Five Remembrances:

I am of the nature to grow old; there is no way to escape growing old.

I am of the nature to have ill health; there is no way to escape ill health.

I am of the nature to die; there is no way to escape death.

All that is dear to me and everyone I love are of the nature to change; there is no way to escape being separated from them.

My actions are my only true belongings; I cannot escape the consequences of my actions.

My actions are the ground upon which I stand.

To be with myself at this time—happy and content in the moment—was all I had, and it was enough. As I practiced this meditation, I felt that each moment of life was absolutely precious and somehow I was communicating this to all that I connected to. Before I slept that night, one last meditation secured me in the refuge of all my spiritual ancestors. Although the focus was on the Buddha, I felt all my teachers and guides throughout lifetimes gathered together inside and around me, without boundaries, and they stayed while I slept. When I fell asleep, I was content and happy.

The next morning, to my surprise and joy, I woke up! Over the next six months, I slowly recovered my health. Friends in North America who tune in to me very closely had booked airline tickets in December to take me out of India to recover. While I was touched by their love, I said no to their proposal.

Whatever the outcome, this particular journey was to be in India. I had written countless Christmas cards to friends and loved ones all over the world and signed them with “Blessings and Love from Ian.” That is what I had wanted to send before my death. Then I lived! And I was even more happy that the cards were sent.

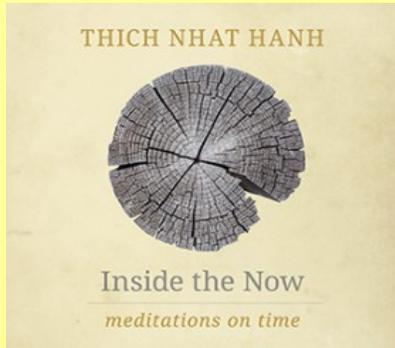
I am glad that at the last moment before leaving for India I intuitively put *The Blooming of a Lotus* into my backpack. It has always been one of my favorite books, as it never fails to take me deeper into myself. I love it for additional reasons now. I can recommend it to people I meet as a “lifesaver,” for it was exactly this for me—a Lotus that carried me through.

Ian Prattis, True Body of Understanding, practices in Canada

Editor’s Note: The Five Remembrances is my favorite Buddhist practice. I hope you enjoyed this moving article.

From Parallax Press...

Inside the Now



Meditations on Time Thich Nhat Hanh

This beautifully designed book will be cherished for generations. Written in the summer of 2013, *Inside the Now* contains the most recent, never before published commentaries and reflections of Thich Nhat Hanh on living in stillness and timelessness.

The book begins with an autobiographical reflection in which we hear the voice of the young monk, poet, and community-builder struggling in war-torn Vietnam to develop a Buddhism relevant to the suffering of his time. These early experiences lay the groundwork for Thich Nhat Hanh's insights into the nature of time and interbeing.

In part two, we hear the clear, direct voice of the Zen Master challenging us to open our hearts, seize the moment, and touch the now. The book is intertwined with poetry from other Zen masters as well as the author's own verse and calligraphy.

- See more at: <http://www.parallax.org/inside-the-now-thich-nhat-hanh/#sthash.prJIXbvH.dpuf>



**End-of-Year DTO Retreat
April 22 through 24, 2016
Mariandale Retreat and
Conference Center
Ossining, New York**

Editor's Note

I am experimenting with a
“Getting-to-Know” Feature.
Here we have **Dilys Davis**
of the Pearland, TX Sangha who
was involved with the
DTO Newsletter
from the beginning.

