

Dharma Teacher Order Newsletter

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Prisoner Program Expands!

Sondra Kaighen, Texas Sangha

*Exciting
update
from
the
Texas
Sangha*

As you know, the Pearland Sangha has been going to a local state prison unit (Luther Unit) for over 3 years now to establish and provide support for the inmates' Buddhist services. We have watched this program grow in a very short amount of time from about 5 or 6 men, to now a steady attendance of about 30+. It took us about 8 months to finally receive the invitation to start that very successful program. We went from conducting the service in all its aspects to now just watching the men develop their own Liturgy program, bell and mokgyo masters and Dharma deliverers. The seeds were sown and we have witnessed the propagation of the Dharma in real time. We've watched some be released as they go out into the world with new tools to help transform their own suffering as well as to share this experience with others.

Early this Summer, one of those inmates that was transferred to a different unit, but stayed in correspondence with us, thirsting for the loss of his experience as a member as part of the Luther Unit Sangha. We were able to guide him into how to establish a sangha at the new unit (Huntsville Unit). Once there were enough prisoners identifying themselves as Buddhist (in Texas, for spiritual volunteers to be allowed to support a particular faith group's services, there must be a minimum of 5 people), we were now able to receive an invitation by the prison chaplain. After a month or two of getting a program approved and scheduled, Thay and Sondra attended the first service at the Huntsville Unit on September 15. The prison is distinguishable in many respects, as they have air conditioning, a beautiful chapel, a koi pond, but most importantly, this prison is also where the Death Row inmates are housed at the end of their incarceration, leading up to their execution date. While we have not gained access to the death row inmates as of yet, we are hopeful that once we are established at the unit, we may also be able to meet with those men at a time in their lives of incredible suffering. At this first visit, there were 7 men in attendance at our service. After the service we met with the chaplain, who welcomed us with open arms and kind heart. We are now "on the books" to begin a monthly visit with the newly established Huntsville Sangha and will also be able to have extended visits with the men on state-designated Buddhist holy days (Bodhi Day, Ullambana, etc.), where our time with the men will be extended from 2 to 4 hours and we can bring fresh vegetarian meals for them to enjoy.

We are ever hopeful to continue this expanding and much-needed service to the suffering, by training additional volunteers to attend the services. They will begin rotating his presence as our trained Dharma teachers and lay priests bring the Dharma to the incarcerated.

The New York Sangha

We are teaching classes at Mariandale both in the Fall and in the Spring for the Mariandale population at large and those classes this year have been scheduled on Mondays. They are an opportunity for the DTO to teach to an audience who might not be interested in Buddhism. In the Fall, we will be teaching on the Four Heavenly Abodes on September 15, October 8, November 12 and December 10. In the Spring, we will be teaching an Introduction to Zen course on January 14, February 11, March 11 and April 8. DTO members are welcome and are invited to participate but the Mariandale classes are not in place of the Dharma Study Program and Dharma Training Program of the DTO.

We are going to continue with the usual DTO classes every other Saturday but this year we plan to start in January.

The Four Heavenly Abodes are also known as the Brahmavihara or The Four Immeasurables. They are the four most important Buddhist virtues. The brahmavihāras (sublime attitudes, "abodes of brahma") are a series of four Buddhist virtues and the meditation practices made to cultivate them. They are:

1. loving-kindness (metta)
2. compassion (karuna)
3. empathetic joy (mudita)
4. equanimity (upekkha)

We also had a program on Interfaith Dialogue on Saturday, September 15 at Mariandale. There were questions for all to share and contemplate rather than a "presentation". These were some of the questions we put forth to the attendees:

1. How did I develop my current spiritual path?
2. What is important for me as I seek my path?
3. What do I want to avoid?
4. Is my spiritual path defined or refined or do I need improvements?
5. Is ceremony important to me?
6. Do I prefer to practice by myself or with others?
7. Are other spiritual traditions too strange, mysterious or old school or can I learn from any or all of them?
8. Why have interfaith dialogues?
9. Who are my spiritual role models?
10. What is love and is it the answer?

The following two pages contain an article on the Four Heavenly Abodes which you might find interesting. When you read it, you will have the opportunity to follow along with us as we teach.

The Four Brahma-viharas

[Metta \(Loving-Kindness\)](#)
[Karuna \(Compassion\)](#)
[Mudita \(Appreciative Joy\)](#)
[Upekkha \(Equanimity\)](#)

Learn more at
www.OneMindDharma.com

What are the Four Heavenly Abodes?

The four Brahma-viharas are four qualities that we cultivate in and out of meditation practice. They are qualities of the heart, offering a counterpart to the [Buddhist insight practices](#). It's often said that the mindfulness/insight practices are like one wing of a bird and the Brahma-viharas are like the other wing; a bird requires both wings to fly correctly. The Brahma-viharas, often referred to as the “heart practices,” are cultivated via specific meditation practices, but they also permeate our mindfulness and [concentration practices](#).

The term Brahma-vihara is Pali, and comes from two words. First, there is the word *brahma*. In the Buddha's time, a *brahma* was a deity who lived in a heavenly realm. The word *vihara* means abode or dwelling. As such, Brahma-vihara can be directly translated as “abode of the divine” or more commonly, “heavenly abodes.” This is pointing toward the mind of one who has fully cultivated these qualities. Cultivating the heart qualities leads to a calm, joyous mind. Although these practices are often slighted, the Buddha suggested on many occasions that developing the Brahma-viharas fully leads to awakening.

Metta (Loving-Kindness)

[Metta](#) is the first of the four heart practices and can be seen as the foundation of the Brahma-viharas. Metta is a Pali word that is most commonly translated as loving-kindness. Sharon Salzberg points out in her book [Lovingkindness](#) that the word metta shares a root with the Pali words for both friendship and gentleness. Although loving-kindness is the most popular translation, we think that “gentle friendliness” is more accurate. Regardless of the English word you use, metta is metta. Rather than seeking to define it perfectly, we should seek to know and understand it experientially.

Metta is a quality of the heart that we cultivate toward all sentient beings (including ourselves). It is the opening of the heart to the experience of others. We cultivate metta through [loving kindness meditation](#). Put most simply, metta is wishing well for others. It is a friendliness, or a gentleness that we offer. In metta meditation, we practice setting this intention to care for others. We may reflect on our own deepest desire to be happy and at ease, remembering that all other beings share this same desire. Knowing that other beings just want to be happy, we can cultivate a heart that cares for the wellbeing of others. Metta doesn't mean we walk around feeling joyous all the time; it is simply a quality of caring about beings and their wellness, and it is a unifying quality. Metta (and equanimity) can also be found on the list of perfections.

Please be aware that all underlined terms are hyperlinks where you can get more information.

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Karuna (Compassion)

The second Brahma-vihara is karuna, or compassion. Compassion can be understood as what happens when metta meets suffering. Whether it is suffering we experience, or the suffering of another, compassion is caring about and being present for the pain we all experience. Compassion is a quivering of the heart in response to suffering in the world. When we come into contact with pain or suffering, the reaction is often to avert. Compassion is an antidote to aversion, which is one of the [Three Poisons](#), or causes of suffering. Compassion means we “suffer with.” It doesn’t mean we [become codependent](#) or rest our happiness on the happiness of another, but we do allow our hearts to open to any suffering with which we come into contact.



In compassion meditation, we practice cultivating the compassionate heart. This means we set the intention to care for the suffering of ourselves and others, rather than pushing it away. Cultivating compassion doesn’t mean we invite suffering in, but we do welcome it when it comes. Setting the intention to care and be present for suffering, we are able to better offer love and support to anybody suffering. Furthermore, compassion helps us not react so strongly with aversion to our own suffering.

Mudita (Appreciative Joy)

The third of the Buddhist heart practices is mudita, or appreciative joy. The Pali word mudita is sometimes translated as sympathetic joy or empathetic joy, but these terms make it hard to relate mudita to our own happiness. We find “appreciative joy” to most accurately represent what mudita is. It is simply the practice of appreciating joy and happiness. Metta becomes compassion when it meets suffering, and it becomes mudita when it meets joy. The quality of mudita is a quality of sharing in joy. When we experience joy ourselves, we often end up not truly appreciating it. We give a reason why we don’t deserve it, know that it won’t last, or simply don’t really notice the joy we are experiencing. With mudita, we recognize the impermanence of joy, and really rejoice in the experience while it is present. When others experience joy, jealousy or judgement may arise. Mudita is an antidote to jealousy and envy, allowing us to simply rejoice that this other person is experiencing happiness. Mudita practice helps us cultivate this quality by continually setting the intention to be present for joy. Mudita meditation, when practiced over time, opens the heart to the joy in and around us. We begin to see more joy, and really find ourselves stopping to enjoy it. Mudita practice is a gradual process of opening the heart to joy. It may seem like this would be a relatively easy Brahma-vihara to work with, but we often see that we resist actually experiencing joy quite a bit.

Upekkha (Equanimity)

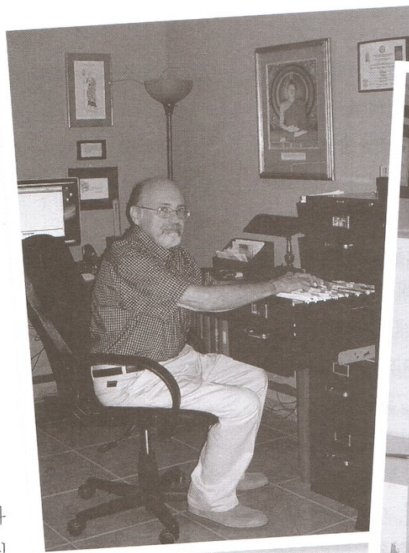
The final of the four Brahma-viharas is upekkha, or equanimity. Equanimity may be seen as the balancing factor that keeps us stable in the opening of the heart. Upekkha is the quality of remaining stable in the midst of everything. As a quality of heart, equanimity helps us not completely base our happiness on the actions and feelings of others. Equanimity is a container of balance that helps hold all of the other Brahma-viharas. Words often used in association with equanimity include acceptance, patience, and stability. This quality of heart, when developed, leads to these three qualities. We are able to separate our wishes for someone from reality, and not cling to how somebody else should act.

Buddhist Prison Correspondence Course Poetry
Facilitated by Sister Catharine Hill Pháp Lan - Dharma Orchid

Samsara

C.W. (Baraga, MI)

This persistent cycle called existence:
Birth, maturation, old age, and death;
A newborn's first breath of air. A few gray
Strands of hair linger on its quietus bed.
Recall a proverb Lord Buddha once said,
"We are the product of all we have thought."
He taught me of the mind stream that flows with creation,
The effects of karma, and the law of attraction;
Of suffering, causation, how dissatisfaction
Drives the rotation of this endless wheel;
Attachment, craving, these attachments we feel—
Defilements of lost lives lived before this.
A serpent bites its tail, on ouroboros
Engulfs all within her constant embrace,
Rebirth ceaselessly spinning through time and space.
Life ends as it begins, reincarnation—
Eyes full of circles until liberation.



**Richard and Adrienne Baksa throughout the years as our Buddhist
Correspondence Prison Course facilitators.**

The Virginia Sangha

Dave Edmonds Reporting



First day of class for the new year! This was a beautiful day for sitting out on the lawn at the temple for our discussion period.

A quick update from Virginia: This year marks the third year for the Dharma Teacher Order at the Dong Hung Temple in Virginia Beach. This is an exciting year for us, as they all have been. It's surprising to know that we are already in year three. This year's co-coordinators are, as in the past two years, Jeffrey Butts and David Edmonds. Our class will be meeting on the second and fourth Sundays of each month, barring holidays and weather events and such. We actually started a little late this year because of concerns about the track of hurricane Florence last month. We ended up having very little in the way of effects, but had decided earlier in the week to cancel the class so that all class members could focus on preparing for the possibility of bad weather.

On October 13th we will be having our first retreat of the year as part of the home temple quarterly retreat program. Also, the last weekend of October is Dong Hung's Compassion Festival which is an annual two day festival for both English and Vietnamese Sanghas. We will be having a visit from Venerable Thich Tri Hoang during this festival, and we are excited to have him here again!

There will be a lot going on this year as we continue to expand the DTO in Virginia Beach. We've learned a lot the past two years and look forward to continuing to learn more.

In Metta, Dave

Connecticut Sangha

Article Submitted by Richard Zipoli

The Connecticut sangha's study group continues to meet at the Universalist Church of West Hartford. Approximately twenty people attended our first 2018-2019 gathering, which was held on September 8th. The next two classes focused on Shantideva's beloved text, *The Way of the Bodhisattva*. Bobbie Martin designed laminated copies of "Shantideva's Prayer" that were distributed to class participants, and the prayer was recited as a prelude to our closing meditation. Richard Zipoli will lead the group through guided compassion meditations during our next meeting, on October 20th, which will be organized as a practicum based on *The Way of the Bodhisattva*.

A tea service and extended discussion will be added to our Saturday morning classes this year. Tea drinking and an informal discussion will take place after a student or teacher's presentation on class readings and a period of walking meditation. Our intention is to create more time for offering comments and sharing insights. Two-dozen teacups were purchased for the tea service, which will begin with the *Drinking Tea* gatha from the Plum Village Chanting and Recitation Book.

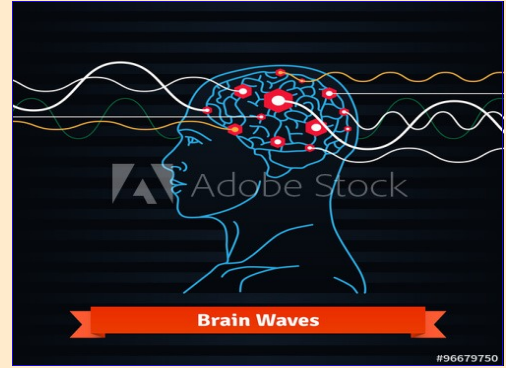
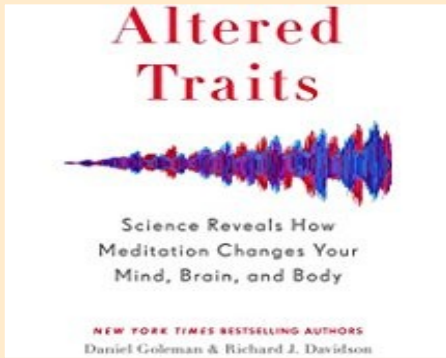
Finally, we have added the book *Learning True Love: How I Learned & Practiced Social Change in Vietnam* to this year's curriculum. *Learning True Love* is the spiritual autobiography of Sister Chân Không, who co-founded the School of Youth for Social Services and Plum Village with Thich Nhat Hanh. As Thich Nhat Hanh notes in his Forward to the book:

"Working for social change and helping people are sources of joy for [Sister Chân Không]. The love and concern that underline her work are deep. ... Her story is more than just words. Her whole life is a Dharma talk."



Chùa Phổ Đà

News from Aaron Doyle: I was lucky and honored to be able to visit Thay's root temple, Chùa Phổ Đà, in Da Nang, Vietnam. I paid homage to the lineage of masters who contributed to the conditions that brought Ven. Thich Tri Hoang to us. Very grateful!



If you are interested in learning about the scientific research findings about the effects of meditation on the human brain and behavior, you might care to view on YouTube this summary of the book *Altered Traits* by [Daniel Goleman](#) and [Richard J. Davidson](#) *:

<https://youtu.be/10J6crRacZg?t=4>

*Underlined author's names are links to these authors on Amazon.com.

Found on internet site while browsing stock prison-related photos...our own Richard Baksa!

