

The Dharma Teacher Order Newsletter

*December 2020
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The New York Sangha

We've Been Busy!

We have an on-going program on Eastern Wisdom for Today's Times at Mariandale Retreat and Conference Center in Ossining and more to come. See Fernando's report, here alongside.

Of course, if you care to Zoom with us, let us know and we will see that you get an invitation.

from 7-9 PM

- ***“Mysticism East and West”*** - Offered on Saturday once a month starting in May for four months from 9-11 AM.

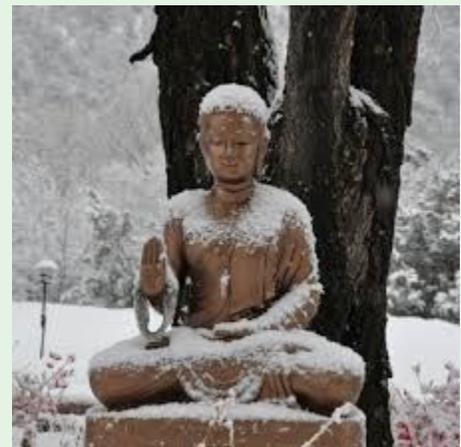
Find them on the website above where you can get more details and register for the classes.

Fernando talked about some of the virtual activities of the NY Sangha at the December 12 Virtual Retreat. Go to the Mariandale link:

<https://mariandale.org/>

These virtual activities are:

- ***“Eastern Wisdom for Today's Times”*** – Offered on Saturdays from 9-11 EST AM twice a month through April.
- ***“The Way of the Bodhisattva”*** – Offered on Monday evenings January through April



Missouri Sangha Report from the Mini-Retreat

DTO Report: Dinh Quang Temple Like the Dong Hung Temple sangha, our DTO program is part of our larger community at Dinh Quang Temple. And we are grateful to have received the continued and deep support and guidance of our teacher, Thay Chanh. This is our second year for our DTO program. The pandemic has impacted some of the participation; we are down from 12 regular participants to 6, plus some irregular attendance from others. Many folks are still navigating schedule changes, technology limitations, and other life issues, along with the cumulative stressors of this year. Our English speaking services moved online in March. We use Facebook to livestream our services on Saturday mornings and Wednesday evenings, followed by Dharma classes using Google Meet.

- On the first and third Wednesdays, we have our DTO classes.
- On the second and fourth Wednesdays, we have sutra studies.
- And on the fifth Wednesdays, we have a Beginning Anew service.
- We also added a daily video practice check-in on Youtube.

In terms of community outreach, we have several ongoing projects:

We assemble emergency meal kits and collect other donations each month for homeless and food insecure folks in our city, with more than 600 meals prepared this year.

- Our Saturday Dharma classes have been dedicated to special issues this year. We focused on cultivating Metta practice during the pandemic from March through June, and we've been using Ruth King's book, *Mindful of Race*, since July to help us apply the Buddha's teachings to addressing the suffering from racism in our selves and our community. (NOTE: I am creating a study guide to use with the book, with reflective activities and questions; please contact me if you would like a copy.)
- We've been providing a lot of spiritual care: we receive regular inquiries from the community, as well as respond to our members dealing with the suffering and grief of this year.
- With our Vietnamese-speaking community, we also helped collect donations to aid flood victims in Vietnam.
- Our prison visitation program at the Federal Medical Prison has been canceled during the pandemic.

Finally, we've been in discussion with Fernando about having a mentor for our group. Currently, our most pressing need is continuing to learn how to make lessons accessible while also covering all the material faithfully.

We're so grateful to be part of the DTO community!

With gratitude and a deep bow,
David Ketchum

What our 2019-2020 year was like:

We were working with the year one curriculum which is Old Path, White Cloud, Heart of the Buddha's teaching, Zen Keys, Concise History of Buddhism, Eightfold Path and Women in Buddhism.

We met in person 13 times and stopped meeting in person in March because of concerns over the pandemic.

Our practice attendance ranged from 7 to 16 people. The average was 11.5.

We had two CT virtual practices (3/28 & 4/11) and then participated in the 6 national online practices through July.

For the last four years we've rented space at a Unitarian church. They have graciously allowed us to keep our cushions and other supplies there at no charge and will welcome us back when it's safe to do so.

We had an unusually high number of people completing the Dharma Studies Program in 2020. There were five of us: Janet Crocker, Richard Downey, Tom McNally, Ted Rasmussen and Craig Hannah.

After several years of having almost no new people attend more than a couple of our practices, we have five new people that have attended regularly since the start of the year.

Our 2020 – 2021 year:

Over the course of 2019-2020 our leadership team developed a program of study intended to explore topics that might be relevant to dharma practitioners, teachers and future teachers.

Paraphrasing Richard Zipolli's description, the potential benefits of this training include:

Providing a vehicle for ongoing development of teaching and leadership skills, while also promoting a deeper understanding of selected issues related to spiritual service, contemplative care, Buddhist chaplaincy, and pastoral work.

Allowing current DTO teachers and priests another venue for continuing to expand their knowledge, skills, and interests.

The recognition that we couldn't meet in person for the upcoming year and the fact that we have no students currently enrolled in the Dharma Studies course prompted us to decide to not conduct classes on the normal DTO curriculum. Instead, we opened the above Dharma Training program up to all regular CT sangha members. A total of 15 CT sangha members opted to participate.

The three recent Dharma Studies graduates in the Virginia sangha found themselves in a similar position to CT and have joined us in this program.

Three of the recent CT graduates and three of the recent VA graduates have offered to organize and facilitate discussions.

The books that we will be primarily focusing on are:

o ***The Buddha in Jail: Restoring Lives, Finding Hope and Freedom***

✦ Lu, Cuong

✦ OR Books, 2019.

✦ *"Lu shares insights into the prisoner's mindset, something with implications for all of us, whether or not we are in a conventional jail."* (From dustcover insert)

✦ ***Awake at Bedside: Contemplative Teachings on Palliative and End-of-Life Care***

✦ Ellison, Koshin Paley and Matt Weingast, editors

✦ Wisdom Publications, 2016.

✦ *"This book isn't about sickness or death – it's about diving into the heart of life discovered when we truly meet another person. Providing practical support, emotional resonance, and celebration of ordinary sacredness, it is a priceless treasure."* ~ Acharya Judith Simmer-Brown, Ph.D.

✦ Instead of tuition and dana this year, we are accepting contributions and donating them to the FoodShare. We will be making a \$600 shortly.

✦ We've had two practices so far, Deborah McDonald facilitated the first half of The Buddha in Jail and Dave Edmonds combined his professional work experience with the second half. Both presentations were interesting, informative and very well done.

✦ Our second book awaits us. It's longer and will be covered over five practices. An impression thus far of the book is that observing and understanding how to skillfully care for people that are face to face with their mortality brings oneself face to face one's own mortality. Not only do you learn how to meet them, you learn how to meet yourself.

Thank you to our local and National leadership for making all of this possible. You live the bodhisattva ideal.

A Brand-New Day

*We can start fresh in this very moment,
not needing to wait for a new day to start anew.*

When today is not going well, it is tempting to focus on tomorrow as a blank slate with all the possibilities that newness provides. It is true that tomorrow will be a brand-new day, but we do not have to wait until tomorrow to start fresh. We can start fresh at any moment, clearing our energy field of any negativity that has accumulated, and call this very moment the beginning of our brand-new day.

There is something about the sunrise and the first few hours of the morning that make us feel cleansed and rejuvenated, ready to move forward enthusiastically. As the day wears on, we lose some of this dynamic energy and the inspiration it provides. This may be why we look forward to tomorrow as providing the possibility of renewal. Many traditions consider the light of the rising sun to be particularly divine in its origins; this is why so many people in the world face east when performing ritual. We too can cultivate that rising sun energy inside ourselves, carrying it with us to light our way through any time of day or night, drawing on its power to awaken and renew our spirits.

One simple way to do this is to carry an image or a photograph of the rising sun with us in our wallet or purse. We can also post this image on our wall at work or at home, or have it as our screensaver on our computer. When we feel the need to start fresh, we can take a moment to gaze at the image, allowing its light to enter into our hearts. As we do this, we might say out loud or quietly to ourselves, I am ready to let go of the past and start anew. We might visualize anything we want to release leaving us as we exhale, and as we inhale, we can take in the fresh energy of the eastern sun, allowing it to light the way to a brand-new day.

Editor's Note: And what could be more apropos to starting anew than these two recordings from the Texas Sangha Wednesday evening meditation and dharma talks...

Talks on Forgiveness, Part One and Two

<https://1drv.ms/v/s!AkNCCzQRWw-th9NniIetKR9Nd6Kq8Q>

<https://1drv.ms/v/s!AkNCCzQRWw-th9g0y79AS9zjwvl0dw?e=aCX5cv>

A Reminder and a Gift for All of Us...

