



Washington  
Mindfulness  
Community

# Sangha Reflections

Winter 2004

Newsletter of the Washington Mindfulness Community

## Carolyn Took a Chance and Thay Came to Capitol Hill!

*an interview with Carolyn Cleveland by Mary Hillebrand*

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** On September 10, 2003, Thich Nhat Hanh addressed more than 400 people at the Library of Congress, including as many as 50 Members of Congress and hundreds of congressional staffers. Two days later, several Members of Congress and their guests joined Thay in suburban Maryland for a two-day mindfulness retreat, marking the first time the teachings of mindfulness have been offered directly to members of the United States Congress. Carolyn Cleveland, a practitioner with the Washington area sanghas, was instrumental in persuading Thay to meet with the lawmakers. Following are excerpts from Carolyn's conversation with Sangha Reflections co-editor Mary Hillebrand about that process and the lessons she and other mindfulness practitioners can take away from those events. The complete text of the conversation can be found at [www.mindfulnessdc.org/reports/cleveland.html](http://www.mindfulnessdc.org/reports/cleveland.html).

**Mary:** Why did you get involved in bringing Thay to Washington?

**Carolyn:** In the last presidential election in 2000, we had such a big change in the White House and in Congress, with Bush being elected President and it becoming a Republican Congress, it was hard not to wonder how this would affect life, and certainly socially progressive causes, such as the environment, the field I was working in. It was easy to go to a place of fear and worry and to quickly demonize those political leaders that could stand against the causes that I stood for.... I began thinking about the mindfulness practice and the teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh about interbeing, how we're all interconnected, and about compassion. And I wondered what it would look like to be practicing mindfulness in the political system, what it would be like to be a mindful lobbyist or a mindful Member of Congress. I knew for me how much the mindfulness practice had impacted my life, how it had provided a greater sense of compassion for other people, a more thoughtful approach to the work that I was doing, how it had strengthened my relationship with my family. Expanding that out to the world, I thought, "What would it be like if our political leaders were coming from that place? What could that do globally?" I just really wanted to bring greater compassion to our political system.

**Mary:** Why Thich Nhat Hanh, as opposed to another person U.S. political leaders are more familiar with?

**Carolyn:** Thay's words, but more than that his way of being, have deeply affected my life. I think it is just that, his

way of being, the way he teaches — that is, not about Buddhism but what is central to the Buddha's teachings, the practice of mindfulness — that I think is so powerful and transformative for people's lives. I mean, anyone from any faith can embrace the practice of mindfulness.

**Mary:** What was your take of Thay's message to the people that gathered for the retreat?

**Carolyn:** I think the strongest message that came through from him was really the very central and basic teachings of following your breath and stopping and calming and looking deeply. And I remember ... one of the nuns saying, "I don't know why I thought he would have something more profound to say for this group than he would say to anybody else." But she said the teaching is the same no matter where you go.... It was the basic and profound and wonderful teachings of mindfulness.... [A]t the end he talked about the importance of supporting families in order to reduce violence in our society and reduce violence in schools. He was very, very interested in making that happen, and I think he was saying it in a way that could sort of appeal to our world leaders, to think about how we could do this. And he talked about the political situation, about the U.S. situation with Iraq. I think he really spoke about asking for President Bush to consider the impact of his actions in Iraq, and he was talking about how nations need to come together to resolve problems. So he was really putting that out there as a way for people to consider.

*See "Thay and Congress," p. 5*

**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. Phone: 301-681-1036.  
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**Sangha Reflections** is primarily distributed via Internet download. If you would like to be added to the WMC electronic notification list, please send your name and e-mail address to wmc@mindfulnessdc.org. If you are unable to access the electronic version, we will gladly mail you a printed copy. Send your name, address, phone number, and a check for \$5 to cover one year's printing and mailing costs, payable to The Washington Mindfulness Community, to the address above.

**Newsletter editors:** Mary Hillebrand, Joseph Byrne; masthead design and graphics provided by Cindy Sherwood.

*Unsolicited contributions and comments are welcome and encouraged!*

## WMC Financial Report 2003

by Joseph Byrne, Treasurer

The year 2003 was a *Thay-Comes-to-Washington* year, which means there was a lot of money flowing in and out of the coffers of the Washington Mindfulness Community. As in past years in which *Thay* visited, the WMC was in charge of ticket sales and general logistics for *Thay's* public lecture on September 14.

Looking at the financial statement below, you'll think that the WMC did quite well indeed, with \$45,692 in the bank at year's end. It should be immediately noted that \$33,460 of that amount has since been sent to the Unified Buddhist Church (which administers the financial aspects of Plum Village). This amounted to 90% of the proceeds from *Thay's* Public Lecture, after costs had been subtracted. By agreement, the WMC kept 10% of the proceeds, which amounted to \$3,718. The WMC did even better selling books, t-shirts and postcards on September

See "*Financial Report*," p. 3



### Morning Walking Meditation

by Peter F. Guerrero

The sun in the east,  
the full moon aligned in the west—  
perfect harmony.

The blue sky above me,  
the sound of birds singing—  
perfect harmony.

A flock of geese landing on the lawn,  
the cool breeze of a new day.  
All in perfect harmony.

Stonehill College Retreat  
August 14, 2003

**Financial Report, from page 2**

14, bringing in \$4,817.

Given the large influx of money, the WMC was easily able to make its usual bi-annual donation of \$750 to the Washington Buddhist Vihara (amounting to \$1,500), the WMC's gracious host. In fact, the WMC Board has decided to up this amount to \$2,000 total each year starting in 2004. The WMC was also able to make a few other donations, including \$150 to the Committee for Mindful Politics (who organized Thay's retreat with Congress—see article on the preceding page), and \$300 to the Being Together Initiative, which works towards reconciliation between Israeli Jews and Palestinians.

As in 2002, the WMC acted as financial conduit for a

couple good causes. The WMC collected \$3,190 for the previously mentioned Being Together Initiative. We also raised funds for fixing up the downstairs bathroom at the Vihara, which, thanks to Joe Toole's enlightened leadership, has been completed. Next on the to-do list: a heater for the downstairs!

You'll notice that, unlike in past years, there is nothing in the financial report that refers to newsletter printing and postage, even though two community newsletters went out in 2003. That's because of the incredible generosity of Mary Hillebrand, co-editor of the newsletter. She donated the costs for both newsletters, which amounted to \$753 for printing (\$230 for summer issue, \$523 for fall issue) and \$65 for postage. Thanks Mary!

**WMC Income 2003****Comm. Care Committee:**

Charter Hall Winter Retreat	\$700
Charter Hall Spring Retreat	\$700
Charter Hall Fall Retreat	\$700
subtotal:	\$2,100

**Thich Nhat Hanh Public Lecture:**

Ticket Sales	\$44,691
Book, T-shirt, Postcard Sales	\$4,817
subtotal:	\$49,508

**General Donation:**

From WMC dana box	\$1,478
subtotal:	\$1,478

**TOTAL INCOME: \$53,086**

**WMC Expenses 2003****Board Allocations:**

Donations to the Vihara	\$1,580
Donation to Committee for Mindful Politics	\$150
Donation to Being Together Initiative	\$300
subtotal:	\$2,030

**Retreat Scholarships:**

	\$1,000
subtotal:	\$1,000

**Operations Committee:**

Phone Bill	\$200
Post Office Box	\$100
Magazine Subscription	\$40
subtotal:	\$340

**Comm. Care Committee:**

Charter Hall Fall Retreat	\$2,100
subtotal:	\$2,100

**Thich Nhat Hanh Public Lecture:**

Rental of Church Hall	\$2,000
Building Insurance	\$300
Security	\$1,200
Sound System	\$1,800
Translators for the Deaf	\$200
Catering/Food	\$450
Printing: Tickets	\$352
Printing: Programs	\$213
Printing: Posters	\$108
Postage	\$100
Complimentary Tickets	\$350
Cash (for Book Sales)	\$390
Miscellaneous Expenses	\$50
subtotal:	\$7,513

**TOTAL EXPENSES: \$12,983**

**WMC Dedicated Accounts****Being Together Initiative**

income:	\$3,190
outlay:	\$3,190
remaining in account:	\$0

**Vihara Bathroom Fund**

income:	\$528
outlay:	\$528
remaining in account:	\$0

**TOTAL WMC DEDICATED ACCOUNTS**

total income:	\$3,718
total outlay:	\$3,718
remaining in accounts:	\$0

**TOTAL INCOME 2002: \$53,086**

**TOTAL EXPENSE 2002: \$12,983**

**difference: \$40,103**

**WMC Account**

**Beginning Balance 2003: \$5,589**

**WMC Account Ending Balance 2003: \$45,692**

## Being Lost

by Joe Toole

As evening comes, two hikers sit on opposite sides of a hill, neither knowing the presence of the other. They are miles from the nearest road, nearest town or, to their knowledge, the nearest human being. One sits cold and shivering, wondering how he ever got so lost and how he will ever find his way home. He is scared and alone. The other hiker is watching the sunset, listening to the sounds of the evening rise along with the stars. He has never felt such solitude and peace. He feels a part of everything around him. He knows where he is...he is lost. And he smiles.

I have often wondered what it is in one situation that makes us feel such anxiety and fear...fear of being lost...yet in an almost identical situation, we feel such peace or even freedom. Usually, I associate the feeling of "being lost" with not knowing where you are. Whether it is being in a strange city and taking a turn you didn't intend, being in a job where you don't know what you are really supposed to be doing, or being in a relationship that seems to be going nowhere. In all of these cases, that feeling of "being lost" seems to have at its core not knowing where you are. Yet, at the same time, I can think of times I have been in strange cities where every turn seemed like an adventure. Where a new job was a fresh place to grow. Where a relationship was a mystery waiting to unfold.

So, it seems that "being lost" isn't simply about not knowing

where you are. It is probably fair to say, that if that was the case, we would all be in a constant state of being lost, wondering where we are in our lives. Instead, I think back to the two hikers on the hill. The real difference wasn't about where they were, it was about where they wanted to be. The cold, fearful hiker wanted to be home, and his every thought was consumed with how to get there. He did not want to be in the woods. In his focus, he did not see that which was around him, except as something fearful. The other hiker was very touched by the beauty of where he was. His focus was on that precious moment, and not where he might have been.

Another difference. The hiker watching the sunset felt, and perhaps even knew, he was not "alone." He felt a connection to the things around him, from the stars to the sounds. The other hiker felt it was only him. He did not see the rest of the world, except as a threat and a barrier to reach where he wanted to be. His sense of being "alone" came from his lack of connection to the world around him. In fact, he was alone with his own thoughts.

Recognizing the seeds of these mental formations growing in us can help us change our lives from one of "being lost" to one of adventure, awakening and celebration. By not focusing on where we want to be, but instead being in the moment, and knowing our interconnectedness with all around us, we can escape the anxiety and fear of "being lost." To remind myself of the beauty of this transformation, I like to say "I know where I am...I am lost."

### Rivers in Search of Water

by Sankar

Words without love:  
Cardboard constructions  
of logic and grammar.

Wayward streams of ink  
meandering endlessly  
over parched deserts of paper.

Dressed up skeletons  
performing an act of walking.

Words,  
are always waiting for love.



### Riding the Moonwaves

by Erica Hamilton

The water is so calm tonight  
I can see the light of the moon  
In the serene reflection  
of all that is

The smile of the moon  
Permeates

My soul  
The life of the water

Twinkles  
As a quiet peacefulness  
Envelopes the night

The water is me  
And I am flowing  
Into the biosphere  
of Gaia  
Into the sweet matter  
That reaches up and softly  
Touches the moon

### Now

by John V. Love

The wind blows hard,  
branches sing,  
clouds hurry by,  
and I breathe.

I see you in the raindrops,  
that splash around me,  
in the flower that blooms,  
and in each new day that the  
sun and moon dance in the sky.

You are here,  
I am here.

Happiness is all around us.

## Thay and Congress, from p. 1

**Mary:** When Thay gave his public talk on Sunday, he had fairly strong words about the way that the United States government has acted in the past couple of years. Was he that direct with the Members of Congress as well?

**Carolyn:** He was. He was, and with that he said, "I am talking to you as a monk. This is my perception and my belief," I think in order to say, "I'm not preaching to you. I'm not telling you how to run the country, but this is how I see it. This is how I view it."

**Mary:** What was the reaction from the Members of Congress and the people who came with them to those words and Thay's message?

**Carolyn:** [One] member shared that the thing that impacted him the most was the dharma discussion [during the retreat] and ... the sort of ground rules of dharma discussion, to speak until you're finished speaking and that you won't be interrupted. He said that was just profound, to think that he could speak and not be interrupted, and he thought if Congress practiced that how much more fruitful the discussion would be. And then he shared, and you could hear the suffering in his voice when he said, "You know, we spent one day talking about the resolution for war." And it really affected him so deeply, that that's all the time that they had spent on that. And in that moment, I really felt how Members of Congress are suffering. They feel trapped by their own system that they're in.

**Mary:** What's the follow-up to such a big event? How do we keep the momentum going?

**Carolyn:** Thay talked about how important it was for the practice of deep listening to happen on both sides, for constituents to be able to support our political leaders by really practicing deep listening with them and really being able to relate to them and have compassion for the places they're coming from. The

way he described it at the retreat, I envisioned like, wow, how amazing it could be for mindfulness practitioners to actually do that, to go to the Hill to visit Members in their offices and just to sit with them and say, "How are you doing? What's happening for you? What's your life like? How do you cope with the stress of all of this? What do you do to support yourself?" And to actually build a relationship with Members of Congress outside of asking them to vote or take action on something, so that it's not adversarial all the time. I think it would do a lot for Members to feel like they're being supported and not that they always have to defend themselves.

**Mary:** Have you had any follow-up conversations with Members of Congress?

**Carolyn:** [Among others] I went back and visited with [Congressman Brian Baird from Washington State] and said, "So, how'd it impact your life?" His eyes were sparkling! Oh, he just couldn't wait to share with me all the ways it was impacting his life.... When he's called to vote and he walks to the chambers to vote, he practices walking meditation. He doesn't walk as slowly as he would within the meditation hall, but he uses that time to collect himself and connect with his breathing. He also talked about how he's used it in contentious meetings, stopping, coming back, collecting himself before continuing to speak.

**Mary:** So slowly but surely the machine of our government is slowing down.

**Carolyn:** Exactly. Exactly. And you've got to imagine the huge force that they're up against, right? I mean, the whole political system is built on "Go! Go! Fast! Fast!" But these guys are taking a stand for looking at it a different way. Like how about stopping and slowing down?

**Mary:** [T]hat's 11 more people who now have a basic understanding of mindfulness and can be a presence of mindfulness for those around them. But they

need encouragement, from the sangha that they may not even realize is out there for them.

**Carolyn:** [One thing I heard from one] Chief of Staff was that he felt alone. He felt alone in wanting to practice mindfulness in his job here in Washington, D.C. ... So I think it was incredibly supportive for him to know that other staffers and Members were interested in the process and that people [outside of Congress] were wanting to support him in practicing. Members...are struggling so much with coming from heart and spirit and compassion in their work. ... [T]hey strive to continue to have that in their lives. But they certainly need support to do that, just like we all do. You know, when someone relates to you as a great person, you get to be a great person. So when we relate to our Members of Congress as compassionate, spiritual people, they get to be that for us!

### reflections from the velvety purple cloak of royal silence

by Sharron Mendel

and out of the silence came music  
and out of the darkness came  
vision  
and she saw, it is often like this -  
out of laziness came motivation  
and drive  
out of exhaustion - real exhaustion  
- came new life

and then she realized  
the promise of Solstice  
and the message of Easter  
are one and the same -  
death, rebirth, hope -  
and white cleansing tears  
flowed  
out of eyes hurting from  
seeing and not seeing

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## MINDFULNESS PRACTICE OPPORTUNITIES IN THE WASHINGTON AREA

**WMC Meditation and Dharma Discussion:** Every Sun., 7-9:15 p.m., at the Buddhist Vihara, 5017 16th Street NW, Washington, DC. Sitting and walking meditation, taped dharma talk by Thich Nhat Hanh, followed by discussion. Everyone is welcome. More info: 301-681-1036; [www.mindfulnessdc.org](http://www.mindfulnessdc.org)

**Live Dharma!** Throughout the year, the WMC hosts dharma teachers during our Sunday evening meetings. Usually the first Sunday of the month; check the WMC website for dates and speakers. Monthly Dharma Class: A chance for sangha members to share their wisdom! Third Sunday of the month, 5:30pm, at the Vihara. For speaker and topic, consult WMC website; [www.mindfulnessdc.org](http://www.mindfulnessdc.org)  
**Second Body Practice:** A wonderful way to strengthen mindfulness practice and build deeper relationships with one another in the sangha. Next round beginning February 22. More info: Steve Sidley at (301)655-2605 or [secondbody@aol.com](mailto:secondbody@aol.com).

**WMC Study Groups:** Beginning February 23, and continuing for six weeks, the group will be studying Tara Brach's Radical Acceptance – Embracing Your Life With The Heart Of A Buddha. Sign up by sending an e-mail to John Love at [JVLove@Excite.com](mailto:JVLove@Excite.com)

**WMC Newcomer Orientation:** Last Sun. each month, 6-7 p.m., before the regular sitting. Open to all, especially newcomers. Informal orientation available on other Sundays; call or e-mail to arrange.

**WMC Retreats:** At Charter Hall, on the Susquehanna River. Upcoming dates: April 23-25. For more info: [wmc@mindfulnessdc.org](mailto:wmc@mindfulnessdc.org)

### Other D.C. Area Sanghas

**Mindfulness Practice Center of Fairfax (MPCF):** At the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Fairfax, 2709 Hunter Mill Road, Oakton, Va. Morning sitting & walking meditation: Mon.-Fri., 8:15 a.m. Mid-day meditation: Thurs., noon. Mindful movement: Tues., 4:15 p.m. Evening meditation: Thurs., 7:30 p.m. Please call 703-938-1377 to confirm. More info: [www.mpcf.org](http://www.mpcf.org).

**Practicing the Art of Mindful Living (MPCF):** All-day workshops with Anh-Huong and Thu Nguyen; donation: \$30-50. Upcoming dates: February 28, March 20.

**MPCF Classes:** Relaxation and Healing Movements; instructor: Thu Nguyen; Wed., 7:30-9pm. March 3 - April 7, 2004. Fee: \$100.

**Arlington Mindfulness Practice:** Monday evenings: 7:30 p.m. Contact Peter Guerrero, 703-820-1524, [pfguerrero@aol.com](mailto:pfguerrero@aol.com).

**Still Water Mindfulness Practice Center:** Sitting meditation and reading: Mon., Wed., Fri., 6:30-7:30 a.m.; Practice evening: Thurs., 7:30 p.m.; at Crossings - Center for Healing Traditions, 8505 Fenton Street, Suite 202, Silver Spring, Md. (above Whole Foods Market). Contact Mitchell Ratner, 301-270-8353, [info@StillwaterMPC.org](mailto:info@StillwaterMPC.org), [www.stillwatermpc.org](http://www.stillwatermpc.org)

**Bethesda Mindfulness Practice:** Wednesday evenings, 9:30-10:30 p.m. More info: 301-897-3648.

**Capitol Hill Mindfulness Practice:** Sitting meditation: Wednesday evenings, 7:30-8:30 p.m. Healing Arts of Capitol Hill 320 G Street NE (3 blocks from Union Station). Call 202-544-9389 ext. 3 for more information

**Boat of Compassion (Thuyen Tu) Sangha:** Mindful day, first Sat. each month, 10-5 p.m., except April and October, when mindful retreat is held. Giac Hoang Temple, 5401 16th St. NW; more info: 703-938-9606, 301-294-7966, [www.crpcv.org/thuyentu](http://www.crpcv.org/thuyentu).

**Annapolis Mindfulness Practice:** Thurs., 7-8:30 p.m. Unitarian Universalist Church of Annapolis, 333 Dubois Rd.; contact Art Hanson, 410-216-9551.

**Columbia Mindfulness Practice:** First Mon. each month, 7-8:30 p.m.; contact Judy Colligan, 410-730-4712.

**Baltimore Mindfulness Practice (Fresh Breeze Sangha):** Practice Day: Saturday, 8:30 -10:30 a.m., at Govans Presbyterian Church, 5824 York Road, in Baltimore. Call or email for directions. Contact: Carol Fegan, 410-323-2180, [freshbreeze@earthlink.net](mailto:freshbreeze@earthlink.net)

### Other Classes & Workshops

**Cultivating a Gentle Heart:** An 8-Week Mindfulness Meditation Class taught by Jeanine Cogan and Freddie Schrider. Mondays, March 1 - April 26, 7 - 9pm. At William Penn House on 515 East Capitol Street. Fee: \$165. To register call: (202) 543-3842.

**Beginning Anew:** The Practice of Loving Speech and Deep Listening. A Weekend Retreat with Meditation Teachers Anh-Huong Nguyen and Thu Nguyen. March 12 - 14, at Claymont Court, Charles Town, West Virginia. For more info and to register: (703) 938-1377 <http://www.mpcf.org/Retreat-2004-March.html>