

Washington
Mindfulness
Community

Sangha Reflections

Summer 2000

Newsletter of the Washington Mindfulness Community

Falling from my own pedestal

(and other adventures at Plum Village)

By Jeanine Cogan (Jcogan5573@aol.com)

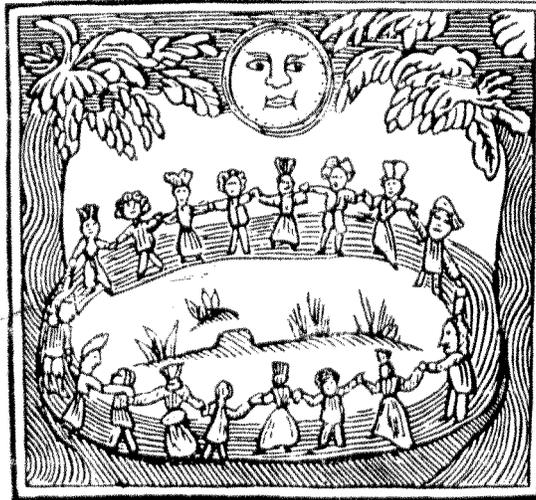
A 21-day retreat with Thich Nhat Hanh nestled in the rolling hills of France with lush green trees and miles of vineyards could only be paradise. Or so I thought. But the untamed mind can go from a purring kitten to roaring tiger without much warning. I had experienced delicious days of mindfulness and weekend retreats with Anh Huong and a 5-day retreat with Thây in the magical mountains of Vermont that was once my home. I touched joy deeply and with such ease by coming back to the present moment over and over again. I was therefore unprepared for where my mind would take me on an extended retreat. I expected to return home with some monk-like quality of peace and stability that would linger for months to come basking in equanimity attained from 21 days of bliss.

Oh how the planning mind can set you up for a jolting fall. Instead I returned home lost in the aftershocks of the earthquake my mind created. Don't get me wrong. Plum Village was all it's cracked up to be. The food was the most palate-pleasing Vietnamese cuisine I'd experienced with layers of flavor bursting in my mouth with each mindful bite. Thây's dharma talks built like a crescendo over the 21 days – where the last few talks left me on such a high I wept. “You are a candle. The world needs light. You have the capacity to light the flame at any time.”

The nuns were radiant yet approachable and real. The lotus ponds were like our pregnant bellies, which we watched ever so diligently. The last week of retreat the first lotus bud opened its petals as if it was stretching itself as wide as the world and holding us all inside, in a gentle yet firm embrace. The brilliance of this birth and the sweet scent filled me with delight and appreciation for the gift of life and I got a glimpse of interbeing.

And we sang. One sun drenched afternoon Sister Martina from Germany who could be recognized through her guitar playing that had hidden remnants of rock and roll rhythm from her life before she became a nun – sat with a group of us around the

lotus pond of the New Hamlet. We sang the same two songs over and over like a woodpecker pecking and pecking at the same spot of a weathered tree trunk. We sang and sang until we got the words, the pitch and the timing perfect and our hearts were full with joy. And later on the retreat these songs became my refuge when my heart was so shut down there was no inkling of opening even a millimeter. I sang the last verse of “Here is the Pure Land” over and over until a teaspoon of space entered my heart. “Breathing in, flowers are blooming, breathing out, I am aware that bamboos are swaying my mind is free and I enjoy every moment.” In fact this song became a mantra which I set to percussion and pounded out the beat using my hands and the church wall which overlooked the farming lands in shades of green – one more deep and edible than the next. I decided then to buy a drum when I return home.



I folded myself into the noble silence as if it were a blanket – enjoying the refuge it offered from performing, from being constantly on. The 45-minute bus rides at 6 a.m. from the New Hamlet where I stayed to the Upper or Lower Hamlets offered a view of the brilliant sunrise. As we drove closer to the orange ball in the sky I felt as though I was

one with the earth, sky, trees, and the birds – all of life around me – and a smile would spread across my heart.

Along with these many moments where the energy of mindfulness brought me such joy – that same energy allowed me to see myself clearly. It allowed me to notice behavior patterns that came from an old wounded place. And in seeing myself so clearly I fell off my own pedestal. The image I had of myself was incomplete as my imperfections came in full focus. Now this process of exploding the ego is actually a good thing. You peel away the layers of illusion, your mask begins to soften, and you get closer to your authentic self – your Buddha nature.

And that is the point of practice. What was startling and damaging for me, however, was how I responded. Instead of

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.

This newsletter is prepared by:

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Please get in touch with us with your comments about the newsletter and any information you would like included. Masthead design and graphics provided by Cindy Sherwood, 301-774-3051. Printing services provided by Community Printing, 202-726-4017.

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If you would like to be added to the **WMC mailing list**, please send your name, address, and phone number, along with a check for \$5 to cover each year's mailing costs, to The Washington Mindfulness Community at PO Box 11168 Takoma Park, MD 20913. (Checks payable to the "Washington Mindfulness Community".)

WMC Community Gathering on July 9, 2000

Fourteen of us participated in the first WMC Community Gathering, which was held at the Dancing Heart Yoga Center on Capitol Hill.

Following a period of meditation, the initial meetings of our three new standing committees (Community Care, Communications, and Operations) took place. The whole group then gathered back together and there for reports from the committees. We then discussed a proposal to support a resolution calling for a moratorium on the death penalty, which had been brought to the WMC by Joseph Byrne. There was very good discussion and at the conclusion it was decided that Joseph would take the suggestions of the community, re-draft the resolution, and bring it to the Board of Directors for a vote.

We spent a little time discussing Thây's upcoming visit in September and Richard asked for volunteers to handle such tasks as selling books at the event, on-site coordination, and dealing with tickets.

It was decided that the next WMC Community Gathering will be on Sunday, October 29th at 2p.m. We agreed to invite Barry Morley, a Quaker who has written on the consensus process, to join us and share his experiences using this process for many years.

Minutes for the WMC Practice Council Meeting, May 29, 2000. (Notes prepared by Carolyn Bluemle)

Items for discussion:

- ◆ The bell inviter training: what standards do we set and how.
- ◆ The possibility of setting up a bell inviting mentorship process.
- ◆ Whether or not to sometimes go around the room two times in the walking meditation since people do not seem to be waiting for the bell. We decided to sometimes walk two times around.
- ◆ Whether to make the length of time while listening to the tape more standard. We decided to let it vary according to content and obvious breaks in the tape.
- ◆ Who would be members of the committees (Operations, Community Care & Communications), happily accepting all that had volunteered.

We then set the agenda for the community gathering, committee meetings, reports on the committee meetings, planning for Thây's lecture, and discussion of death penalty moratorium. Next meeting to be announced.

Thich Nhat Hanh Arrives in DC September 14

In a little over two weeks time, Thich Nhat Hanh will be amongst us once again! He will be giving a public lecture, entitled "The Way of Compassionate Action," at 7:00 p.m., Thursday, September 14th at the Washington Hebrew Congregation (Macomb Street and Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Washington, DC). Members of the Washington Mindfulness Community—which is hosting the event, along with the Insight Meditation Community of Washington—have been hard at work making preparations. There are many volunteer opportunities available, so check you schedule and think about whether you can plug in. If you'd like to volunteer, contact Richard Brady, at 301-270-4206 or bradyr@sidwell.edu

There are still tickets available for the event for \$20 at the following bookstores:

✿ **Borders Book Shop**

Tysons Square, VA and Fairfax, VA stores only

✿ **Chuck & Dave's Books & Etc**

Takoma Park, MD

✿ **Olsson's Books & Records**

Bethesda, MD and Alexandria, VA stores only

✿ **Politics & Prose**

Chevy Chase, DC

✿ **Trover Shop**

Capitol Hill, DC store only

Tickets are also available on Sunday evenings, 7-9 p.m., at the Washington Mindfulness Community weekly sitting, at the Washington Buddhist Vihara, 5017 16th St. NW, Washington DC. For more information, you can go to the Washington Mindfulness Community webpage at <www.mindfulnessdc.org>

Poetry by Jindra Cekan

Life-lines

Desire arrives sounding stacatto
 stiletto heels
Serve me!

Longing arrives in slippers
 shuffling along a polished floor
Satisfy me?

Certainty clamps itself on my calves
 like a humping dog
... Persuasively
Convincing me.
 Until I question even it.

Fear slithers among these three
 as well as other thought-formations
 oozing into crevices of peace,
My commonest guest.

Detach, detach, I implore the sails of my mind
... until I let go of even this life-line, command.

Jesus-Siddhartha

Jesus-Siddhartha

You promised salvation
 but I couldn't smell the incense
 or feel the saint's robes
under my fingers
 or see the candle-wicks
to light them.

You promised nirvana
and I could hear the rustling
 of the bodhi leaves
and hear the reverberations
 of the mindfulness bell
and feel the floor planks
 under my feet, circling
Home.



"To be thoroughly lazy is a tough job, but somebody has to do it. Industrious people build industry. Lazy people build civilization." -- Kazuaki Tanahashi



Activist Corner



The following is a speech I gave at a rally calling for an end to sanctions against Iraq on Hiroshima Day, August 6, 2000 - Joseph Byrne

The Buddha's first precept—non-killing, or non-violence—is the first step on the path, the first step towards enlightenment and liberation. When we take this precept, it changes everything. It impacts where we live, where we work, what we wear, what we buy. Within this precept is the whole of buddhism, and all the other precepts as well. This is what my teacher, Thich Nhat Hanh, calls "interbeing." All the precepts are connected; all of us are connected. Iraqis and Americans are connected. When we kill them, we kill ourselves. It is, as Martin Luther King said, nonviolence or nonexistence.

Thich Nhat Hanh often asks us to imagine our enemy as a six-year-old child. This is ironic today because, according to the State Department, six-year-old children in Iraq *are* our enemy. That's why we allow policies that kill them by the tens of thousands. According to UNICEF, one million people in Iraq have died as a result of sanctions—500,000 of them children. That's horrifying and we the people, we the voter and the taxpayer, have approved of this policy and paid for it.

I think the anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima is an excellent time to talk about sanctions in Iraq. It provides us with a very helpful analogy. When talking to people, we can say: Did you know that the United States dropped a Hiroshima-style bomb on Iraq? And that we did it *after* the war was over? In fact, we've dropped that bomb on them every year over the past ten years. That bomb is called sanctions. Around 100,000 people died after the bombing of Hiroshima; around 100,000 people have died yearly as a result of sanctions in Iraq. If we told people that we had dropped ten atomic bombs on Iraq over the past ten years, they would be horrified. Yet the American people allow the sanctions to continue, to kill as many as ten Hiroshima bombs.

And yet to say that the people who made this policy are war criminals, to say that all of us who cooperate with this policy are war criminals, is not helpful. So what is helpful? How do we stop this genocidal policy? We need to generate compassion for the children who are dying, but we also need to generate compassion for those who perpetrate these crimes as well. As buddhists, we don't believe that people relish doing evil; they do it because, deep down, they suffer as well, or because they are caught in the web of violence. And if you can help them transform that suffering, if you can help extricate them from that web of violence, you can help stop the killing. So we are to cultivate compassion. But as Thich Nhat Hanh has said—and as the Dalai Lama has said—compassion is not enough.

We must also act. We must put our bodies between the innocent and those that would harm them. "Do not kill; do not let others kill." Speaking out, marching in solidarity—these are excellent ways of preventing the killing. Bringing medical supplies to Iraq, sitting down in the streets outside the State Department and refusing to leave until your message is heard—these also are excellent means.

I realize we can't all sit in the streets, but there are things all of us can do. If we look deeply into our hearts, we will find our part in stopping the killing. Just we are all responsible for the killing, we are responsible for the solution as well.

Falling from my pedestal

(cont. from page 1)

appreciating the insight – my judge (who turns out to sit on very high seats looking down) came thundering to center stage. She read me the riot act at least a dozen different ways. "How could you be so flawed? I thought you had your shit together. I thought you worked that one out years ago. You were supposed to be perfect. You have failed me." I had become my own worst enemy.

That's how I left retreat – in the middle of my self-created earthquake and unsure how to put the scattered pieces back together. Perhaps I should just let the pieces lie letting them be for now. And to my surprise I was avoiding the practice. I would stare at my cushion in the morning and walk away – go turn on my computer instead. Eventually I had a meeting with Richard Brady as I was actively seeking out advice and guidance from long time students of the practice. I knew I needed more than reassuring words. I needed a practice that would help me move out of this place of self-criticism that was drowning me.

Since my critic was so domineering I needed a practice of compassion and love. Richard offered me just that. He instructed me to sit on my cushion and meditate on my five-year-old child. I used a picture of myself. For the first week or two I was asked to send my five year-old Jeanine love. On the in-breath I would say "I am holding you" and on the out-breath I would say, "I love you." As I looked into the innocent eyes of my five-year-old self sending her love my heart opened wide. It was as if a door had been opened in an airtight room and a gentle breeze blew through. The second part of the practice (after a couple of weeks doing the first) was to then feel myself as the five-year-old child and receive the love that is given. So on my in-breath I would say, "You are holding me" and on the out-breath I would say, "I feel your love." This practice was a gift. I shifted almost immediately and then continued to shift as I practiced.

Today I feel deep gratitude for so many gifts: gratitude for impermanence, for Thây and Anh Huong, for my sanghas, for Richard Brady, for the practice, for the exploding of ego, and for my imperfect self. With each new explosion of ego I become freer. And I hear the last three lines of one of our favorite songs "I am free, I am free, I am free" in a whole new way.

Joseph Byrne, a member of the WMC board, has asked the community to consider passing a resolution calling for a moratorium on executions. This is part of a larger campaign initiated by an organization called Equal Justice USA, which is a non-partisan effort (including some pro-death penalty adherents) with the aim of creating the necessary public space for a fruitful dialogue on the merits and demerits of the death penalty. With this in mind, the WMC will discuss the proposed resolution at the next Public Gathering on July 9. The proposed resolution is printed below.

This wording from the 10th Mindfulness Training of the Order of Interbeing may help us in our reflection: “We are determined not to use the Buddhist community for personal gain or profit or transform our community into a political instrument. A spiritual community should, however, take a clear stand against oppression and injustice and should strive to change the situation without engaging in partisan conflicts.”

Buddhist Resolution Calling for a Moratorium on Executions

WHEREAS Buddhism is a religion and a philosophy that calls for a commitment to nonviolence:

- ❖ The Buddha’s First Precept enjoins the disciple to protect and cherish life, in all its forms—including the life of a murderer.
- ❖ The Dhammapada says “Everyone fears punishment; everyone loves life, as you do. Therefore do not kill or cause to kill,” *The Dhammapada, Chapter 10*.

WHEREAS there is ample evidence that the death penalty is applied in a racist manner:

- ❖ In 1987, in *McCleskey v. Kemp*, the U.S. Supreme Court refused to act on data demonstrating the continuing reality of racial bias.
- ❖ In 1990, the U.S. General Accounting Office reported “a pattern of evidence indicating racial disparities in charging, sentencing and imposition of the death penalty.”
- ❖ Nationwide, 82% of those put to death had been convicted of murdering a white person even though people of color are the victims in more than half of all homicides.

WHEREAS death sentences are reserved for the poor:

- ❖ About 90% of those persons facing capital charges cannot afford their own attorney.
- ❖ No state has met standards developed by the American Bar Association (ABA) for appointment, performance and compensation of counsel for indigent prisoners.

WHEREAS prisoner appeals have been severely curtailed, increasing the risk of the execution of innocent people:

- ❖ In a series of rulings since 1991, the Supreme Court has drastically restricted the rights of death row prisoners to appeal their convictions and death sentences in federal courts, even in cases where prisoners present compelling evidence of innocence.
- ❖ In 1996, new legislation drastically limited federal court review of death penalty appeals, and gutted public funding of legal aid services for death row prisoners.

WHEREAS the ABA has concluded that administration of the death penalty is “a haphazard maze of unfair practices with no internal consistency” and has called for a moratorium on executions.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that this congregation calls on the Governor and our state representatives, and President Clinton and our representatives in Congress, **to institute a moratorium on executions** at least until policies and procedures are implemented which:

- ❖ Ensure that death penalty cases are administered fairly and impartially, in accordance with basic due process,
- ❖ Minimize the risk of that innocent persons may be executed, and
- ❖ Prevent the execution of mentally retarded persons and person who were under the age of 18 at the time of their offenses.

Be it further resolved that copies of this resolution shall be forwarded to our Governor and our state representatives and President Clinton and our representatives in Congress.

WMC CALENDAR

Summer 2000

WMC Meditation and Dharma Discussion: every Sunday evening at 7-9:15 PM, at the Buddhist Vihara at 5017 16th Street, N.W. in Washington, D.C. Sitting and walking meditation and a brief taped dharma talk by Thich Nhat Hanh are followed by a discussion. Everyone is welcome.

WMC New Member Orientation: last Sunday of every month, 6-7 p.m. It's a time to ask questions about sitting, walking meditation, bells, gathas and other aspects of Mindfulness practice. Open to all, but especially for newcomers. Informal orientations can be arranged for other Sundays.

Mindfulness Practice Center in Oakton, VA: Morning Sitting & Walking Meditation: Monday to Friday 8:15-9:15 a.m. Noon meditation: Thursday, 12-12:45 p.m. Afternoon Deep Relaxation/Stress Releasing: Thursday 3:30-4:15 p.m., Mindful Movement: Tuesday & Thursday, 4:15-5 p.m. Children's Program: Monday 4:00-4:45 p.m. Thursday Evening Meditation: Thursday 7:30-9:00 p.m. Please call 703-938-1377 to confirm.

Stillwater Mindfulness Practice Center: Sitting meditation and reading every Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings from 6:30 am to 7:30 am; sitting meditation and other mindfulness practices Wednesday evenings, 7:30 p.m.. All at Crossings in Takoma Park, MD. Call Mitchell Ratner for details: 301-270-8353 or email him at: mratner@erols.com.

Capitol Hill Mindfulness Group: every Wednesday evening from 6:15 to 7:15 p.m. at the Dancing Heart Center, 221 5th St., NE, Washington, DC (just off Stanton Square near Mass Ave.). **Sponsoring a Day of Mindfulness with Anh-Huong Nguyen** on Sunday, Oct. 29. For more information and to register: 202-547-4569. Also sponsoring **Steps for Peace**, Sunday, November 12, 2 p.m., starting from Dancing Heart Yoga Center. For more information: 202-544-0841 or <jshrider@jgc.org>

Annapolis Mindfulness Practice Group: Thursdays, 7-8:30 p.m. Unitarian Universalist Church of Annapolis, 333 Dubois Rd. Contact: Art Hanson, 410-216-9551.

Columbia Mindfulness Group: First Monday of month, 7-8:30 p.m. Contact: Judy Colligan, 410-730-4712.

Bethesda Mindfulness Group: Tuesdays & Thursdays, 7-8 a.m. For directions and more info, call: 301-897-3648.

DC Meditation Group: every 2nd & 4th Wednesday from 7:30-9:30 p.m. Meditation, discussion & videos on various topics

and teachers. Contact Jim Hughes: 202-265-5985.

Saturday Morning Meditation: 8:30 - 10:15 a.m., Baltimore Fresh Breeze Mindfulness Sangha in Towson, MD. Contact Carol Fegan: 410-583-7798.

The Mintwood Zendo, a sangha for gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgendered Buddhists, meets every Wednesday at 6:30 p.m., at the Friends Meetinghouse in Washington, DC. Call 202-332-9261 for more details.

Weekly Sitting Group in Northern Virginia facilitated by Stig Regli: Sundays, 7:30 - 9 p.m. 4311 N. 2nd Road, #1, Arlington, VA. Contact Stig: 703-528-1944, stig@ix.netcom

Vipassana Meditation Classes, led by Tara Brach: Wednesdays, 7:30 - 9:00 p.m. Classes include meditation instruction, group sitting, and dharma talks. River Road Unitarian Church, 6301 River Road, Bethesda, MD (Enter from Whittier Boulevard). Classes are held in the main sanctuary. A \$5 donation is appreciated. Please bring a sitting cushion and a zabuton or blanket. Chairs are available. For more info, contact Dori Langevin at (301) 562-7000 or meditate@imcw.org. A brief orientation is held each Wednesday at 7:00 p.m.

Vipassana Meditation Classes led by Luisa Montero-Diaz and Lynn Kelly: Sundays, 7 - 8:15 p.m. at Willow Street Yoga Center, 6930 Carroll Ave., Takoma Park, MD. Contact Luisa: 301-891-2780, luisana@aol.com or Lynn: 301-530-4363, LKelly@nih.com
Introduction to Meditation class beginning September 24th. Contact numbers above to register.

Being Peace: Days of Mindfulness with Anh-Huong and Thu Nguyen. We come together once a month to learn and practice the art of mindful living as a community. Join us at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Fairfax, 2709 Hunter Mill Road, Oakton, Virginia. Space is limited so call now at 703-938-1377. Suggested donation is \$30 to \$50.

Upcoming dates: Sept. 16, Oct. 14, Nov. 8, Dec. 16.
Retreat at Claymont Court: Dec. 1-3.

Mindfulness Days with the Boat of Compassion (Thuyen Tu), a Vietnamese zen group practice in the tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh: First Saturday most months, at the Buddhist Congregational Church of America, 5401 16th St. NW, Washington, DC. Meditation from 10 a.m. - noon; vegetarian lunch afterwards. To confirm, contact Anh-Huong Nguyen: 703-938-9606, Que Tran: 301-589-8234, or Vien Nguyen: 301-294-7966.