

Washington  
Mindfulness  
Community

# Sangha Reflections

Summer 2001

Newsletter of the Washington Mindfulness Community

## Letting Go

by Carolyn Bluemle

I had a difficult relationship with my mother. It was not all that unusual. She was shy and reserved (I called it “rigid and cold”). I was exuberant and warm (father called it “self-willed and melodramatic”). She was critical (subtext: caring). I was critical (subtext: defensive). In our family of three, father was on a pedestal, she in the mud. Dad with his crippled ego bought into it and, totter-

*Over the last year, many of our sangha brothers and sisters have experienced the deaths of family members and loved ones. As a way to hold a space for these sangha members, an evening last fall was dedicated to honoring those whose bodies have died, offering to each other the gifts of what we hold of them in our hearts. To bear witness and support each other through crucial periods is what sangha living is all about. What participants experienced, though, was perhaps an unexpected depth of practice and sense of gratitude. Sangha light shone on wrenching loss, tender memories, deep-rooted anger, simple joy and the confusion of unanswered questions without distinction or preference. And in all this, we also realized that our loved ones are not gone, but continue on in some form or another.*

*After our evening of remembrance, it was suggested that we devote a whole newsletter to the theme of death and continuation. So here we've compiled poems and articles in honor of those who have gone ahead of us. Their presence truly continues, in our hearts and minds, and in these words.*

---the editor

ing on that pedestal, ridiculed her. She with her crippled ego bought into it and just tried harder to please him. I bought into it too.

One day I woke up a bit and saw that in putting my mother down I dragged myself down with her. We inter-are. That compounded with watching her difficulties with her own mother, difficulties I did not relish repeating, gave rise in me a

desire to love my mother. But try as I might, I couldn't make myself like her and love her the way I wanted. Such things are not directly responsive to the will. I prayed and I engaged in practices to help me. I imagined my mother as a five-year-old child. I imagined my mother's death. These did not do the trick but they did prepare the ground. She was still critical. But she loved me and she too tried very hard. I now think I must have intimidated her. We went along this way for years with various minor breakthroughs along the way.

When she started to suffer the effects of Alzheimer's, her True-Self began to shine through. As she started losing her memory, it took all her resources to stay afloat. She no longer had the energy it takes to build high walls of defense. Her deeper nature peaked through the cracks: soft and vulnerable, alive and caring. A lotus was growing out of the mud. I fell in love. My own walls dropped, and there we were: two hearts wide-open.

She let go of so much: her identity as a travel agent, as a golfer, as a bridge player, as one who loves literature and dance and theater and great cooking and walking the beach, as one who can help others, her independence. She



**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.

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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".)

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*Unsolicited contributions/comments welcome.*

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## Washington Mindfulness Community Minutes of the July 15 Community Gathering

There were 12 members of the Washington Mindfulness Community gathered at the Buddhist Vihara on 16<sup>th</sup> St., Washington, DC for this Community Gathering. Richard Brady facilitated the meeting.

### Community Care Committee Report

Steve Sidley reported that the Community Care Committee had met in June. It was decided that the second round of the Second Body Practice would begin by August 28 and that all members of the Community who wished to participate would need to submit their application for this by July 24, which could be done by email to [secondbody@aol.com](mailto:secondbody@aol.com). Feedback received so far on Second Body Practice is that participants found it helpful for their daily mindfulness practice, and after becoming involved in Second Body Practice they became more aware of the demands of this commitment.

Additionally, it has become apparent that some members are not available because of work and family demands, particularly those who travel a lot for their jobs. It appears that a number of these people will not continue participating in the Second Body Practice.

The Community's social activities formula for the Sunday evening meditation continues to be developed. It has been observed that a number of people leave when the social activities part of the evening begin. However, for the last two social activities evenings most people stayed to participate in them. It was suggested that the Sunday meditation session could start earlier or the time for meditation shortened to allow more social time, as a way of keeping social activities incorporated into the existing Sunday evening structure. It was also suggested to place on the WMC email list-server a message asking members what they thought would work for social activities at the Sunday night meditation. There was another suggestion for social events at other times and places; maybe having a potluck get together quarterly.

The Community Care Committee reported there is interest in outreach to the gay community and in implementing more community service, such as working at a local food bank. There is also interest in the possibility of forming ad hoc Clearness Committees, which would provide sangha members in

Louise Norton Menza Nartautus Mikulis  
by *Bill Menza*

Dear Mother,  
So steadfast and faithful,  
So religious  
Thank you so much,  
In showing us the Path  
We are all on—  
To return from where we came.  
As we all get closer to the earth  
And further from the sky.

Go in peace,  
God bless you  
And we who remain.  
As you remain in us  
And all you touched  
And gave birth to.

Remember the Nursing Home Chapel  
With its stain glass windows,  
Crucifixion cross,  
Exit signs, wheelchairs,  
Old bodies decaying  
With senility.  
You told us: “this is the path too.”

You breathed with difficulty,  
Struggling to keep us company.  
A frail old mother  
With her unparalyzed left hand  
Touching her ancient face  
As your eyes open to space somewhere  
With small grunts and cries.  
Your withered, wrinkled flesh sagging  
On this once blonde-haired  
Lithuanian young beauty.

There you were mom:  
Nartautus, Mikulis  
Lithuania, Chelsea, Everett,  
Florence Street,  
All our ancestors.

Such is the Way  
At 89 years  
As no more can be done  
As nature takes it's course  
For you to return,  
Leaving behind  
Your six children,  
Twelve grandchildren,  
And dear relatives and friends.

We stood gazing  
With eyes moist  
As we waited and feared  
That final out-breath.  
Ah—breathing out,  
You were gone  
Over to the other side.  
Goodbye dear mother.

You taught us:  
I am of the nature to get sick.  
I will get sick.  
I am of the nature to get old.  
I will get old.  
I am of the nature to die.  
I will die.

Everything and everyone we love  
changes.  
There is no escape  
From the separation that follows.  
The consequences of our actions  
Are our only belongings.  
They are the ground  
On which we live and die.

How are you and I to be  
With the dying?  
With the living dead?  
With the dead?  
With my dead mother?

To be with them,  
Be with them  
As you would be  
With yourself  
In the present moment,  
With this out-breath.

With an empty self  
Open to all things  
Connected to all things.  
Intimately with the oneness  
Of life and death.

We are here together very briefly,  
So let us accept reality fully  
And take care of one another  
while we can.

Go in peace.  
May God be with you.  
God bless you all.

## Memories of Jim

by Richard Brady

August 4 - I've just returned from a memorial service for former WMC member Jim Hughes, who ended his tormented life earlier this week. Jim served the sangha in many ways, among them: helping establish a study group, helping with newcomer orientations and frequently serving as greeter on Sunday evenings.

It is likely that Jim was the most well-read scholar of Eastern spiritual traditions ever to be a member of our community. Talking with Jim about the dharma was, as a WMC friend of Jim's put it, like trying to drink from a fire hydrant. Jim's energy, enthusiasm, and assertiveness often proved overwhelming for sangha members. Within months of his arrival at the WMC, several people privately expressed their concerns to me. Wanting to try to understand Jim better, I got together with him for lunch. Jim had a great deal to say about practice and about the sangha. I shared a few observations but felt no inclination to bring up Jim's dharma discussion behavior. As our time together was drawing to a close, Jim asked me whether there wasn't something else I had wanted to address with him. I assured him there was not.

After that, I had lunch with Jim whenever I felt uneasy about his sangha participation. I discovered that it was easier for me to have wonderful heart-to-heart talks with him if I steered our conversations towards our personal lives and away from Buddhism. At the memorial service many friends and family members spoke of Jim's tenderness, caring, love, and tremendous ability to listen. I was privileged to meet this Jim over lunch, where I heard references to the demons he struggled with as well. I came to understand that the intensity of Jim's spiritual search was fueled by his tremendous desire for peace. I am saddened that he was not able to find the peace he sought through practice. May all of us in whom Jim continues to live carry on his search and share with others whatever peace we find.

From Shirley with Love

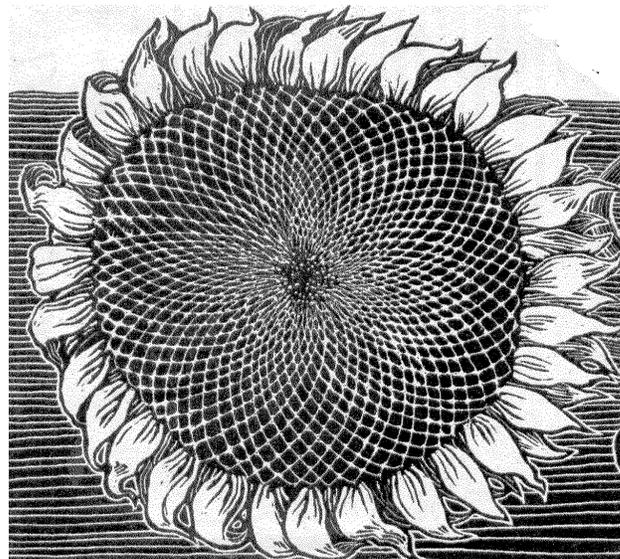
by Irene D'Auria

Death  
I know death  
What I mean is  
I know that I will die  
Death  
This knowledge of my death  
Helps me to live  
My life as it is

A life without regrets  
Nothing left un-lived  
Everything done  
Done with compassion

Death holds my hand  
Leads me through my fears  
Through self doubt  
Through unworthiness  
Through unwillingness  
Through forgetfulness  
Through clinging and wanting  
Through my fears to peace  
Through an open door that  
Leads me to love  
To trusting myself  
To respect for my ideas  
To remembering  
Remembering we are one  
One with all that is  
Death holds my hand  
Leads me to love  
All of you here

Death holds my hand  
And leads me to love  
Death holds my hand  
And leads me to love  
Death holds my hand  
And leads me to love

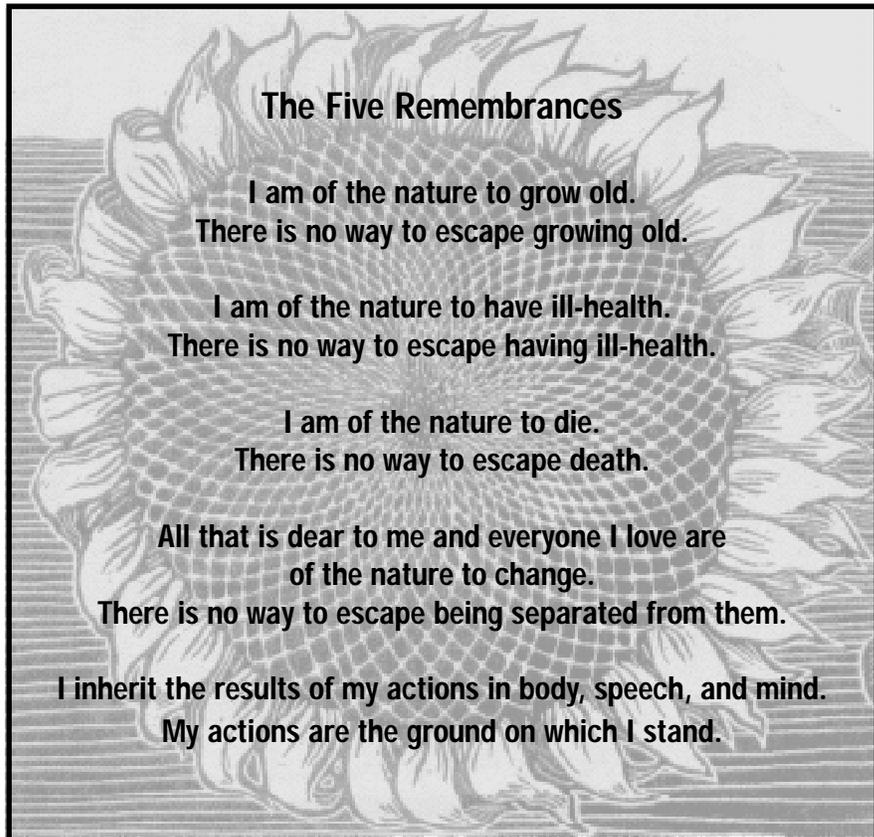


**Letting Go, cont. from pg. 1**

even let go of having been any of these. The more she let go the less there was in the way between us, or between her and anyone else. Her presence was pure and complete. She was not bound by a sense of self; she was not bound by all these categories of self-justification. Her Buddha nature became visible and everyone fell in love with her.

I too had to let go. As her life was dismantled, I let go with her. This required conscious grieving; from time to time we cried together. Only in that letting go could we enter into full acceptance and appreciation of the present. In the letting go, I reassured her that she had lived a good life. In the end I was able to fully, with all my heart, say to her five things: I love you; I thank you; I forgive you; I ask your forgiveness; and Goodbye. She died peacefully and with grace.

In her last years, she had become love, unaware of herself as such. As I enter a new phase of letting go in saying goodbye, I carry



**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 having 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.**

**I inherit the results of my actions in body, speech, and mind.  
My actions are the ground on which I stand.**

**Contemplation on No-Coming, No-Going**

**This body is not me.  
I am not limited by this body.  
I am life without boundaries.  
I have never been born,  
and I have never died.**

**Look at the ocean and the sky filled with stars,  
manifestations from my wondrous true mind.  
Since before time, I have been free.  
Birth and death are only doors through which  
we pass, sacred thresholds on our journey.  
Birth and death are a game of hide-and-seek.**

**So laugh with me,  
hold my hand,  
let us say good-bye,  
say good-bye, to meet again soon.**

**We meet today.  
We will meet again tomorrow.  
We will meet at the source every moment.  
We meet each other in all forms of life.**

---Thich Nhat Hanh

her sweet smile in my heart. They say the next Buddha will be Maitreya: Buddha of love. This Buddha does appear in our midst and I saw her in my mother's smile. In those last years, my mother gave the greatest gift of all: SHE OPENED THE HEARTS OF ALL WHO MET HER.

**Ceremony of Remembrance**

Last fall, the WMC had a memorial service to support all those who had lost loved ones in the previous year. We'd like to make it an annual event.

On **Sunday, November 4, 2001**, the WMC will have it's second annual Ceremony of Remembrance. The second half of our regular Sunday gathering will be devoted to the remembrance of those who have gone before us, and to offer support for those who are left behind. We will remember, look deeply, and see how our loved ones continue to be present in our life. Please join us.

**Community Gathering, cont. from pg. 2**

crisis small groups of people they could talk to.

The Committee also reported there is interest in forming a study group. Questions: Should the group meet semimonthly or monthly for two to four months? Should it meet an hour before the Sunday night sitting? It needs to be clear that the group will be focused on practice and not on intellectual discussions. One possible area for study by the group could be on relationships, intimacy, and sexuality. Thay's book "Teachings on Love" was suggested as a possible book to use for this. Using a dharma book to help format discussions could be helpful. There needs to be a solid commitment by those joining the group that they would be expected to participate in all of the group's meetings. At the same time, group members could decide to meet at different times than those planned, if most members could not attend on certain dates. Each meeting would begin with a sitting. The group would consist of about 10 persons or less. No new members could join the group after it began meeting; it would not permit anyone to just drop in. The idea would be to build a solid, stable intimate group where trust could be established for deep sharing on the practice in one's life. The Community Care Committee will prepare a study group proposal for the Practice Council to review. Richard Brady will distribute the proposal on the WMC email listserver for comments from the Community.

Another study group could be on engaged Buddhism. It could include the sharing by Community members who are

active in various community issues and organizations about their experiences, the issues, and their organizations.

**Practice Council**

Richard Brady reported that the Charter Hall Retreats (three times a year) are having a low turn out. This has led to some rethinking on the format for the retreats. So the Fall retreat (September 28-30) will be a music making weekend with a Saturday afternoon concert.

**Board of Directors**

Joseph Byrne reported that the Community has a bank account balance of \$7,008.39. From this, \$750.00 dollars will be donated to the Buddhist Vihara and another \$750.00 to the Maple Forest Monastery in Vermont. Also, the WMC Scholarship Fund will be used by a Community member to attend the next mindfulness retreat.

Richard reported that the WMC received a letter from the US Internal Revenue Service on its application to be a tax-exempt church entity. Papers for this were filed with the IRS about 7 months ago. The letter asks questions that have to do with the sale of books and transcripts by the WMC. Attorney Carolyn Klamp is helping with our reply. Having church status with the IRS will mean that all contributions to the WMC will be tax deductible and the WMC will not be required to file a tax return each year.

**Communication Committee Report**

Joseph Byrne reported that the Communication Committee would meet within the next few weeks to conduct its business. Mary Hillebrand has become a Committee member; and Bill Menza and Nacho Cordova are discontinuing Committee membership. Joseph is working on the next WMC newsletter for publication by the end of July or by early August. The newsletter's theme will be on death and dying. Lynd Morris and David Steigerwald have agreed to allow the WMC telephone answering machine to be connected to a second telephone line at their house. WMC will pay for the costs of maintaining this second line.

**Operations Committee**

It was reported that Catherine Hobbs was instrumental in getting an extra cabinet at the Vihara for the WMC to keep its books and papers. Also, there continues to be a need for people to sign up to be the Bell Master for upcoming Sunday meditation sessions.

**New Business Items**

It was suggested that the Community complete the adoption of a resolution calling for a moratorium on the death penalty. Joseph said that he would give a draft, which had been prepared some time ago, to Bill Menza for updating before it is presented to the Board for approval.

It was also suggested that a Committee be established to look into a residential community for interested WMC members.



Come join us on **September 28-30** at scenic Charter Hall Retreat Center in Perryville, Maryland, for the **WMC Fall Getaway Weekend**.

Our special theme this time out is Mindful Music-making. We will spend the weekend singing, dancing, and making merry, and on Saturday night we will have a concert, featuring the week-end participants.

We will also have morning and evening meditations, adult and kid activities, mindful meals and meal preparations by participants. This is a lovely way to relax, enjoy getting away to the countryside and being on the water (perhaps in a Charter Hall canoe), and to connect with members of our community in a fun way.

The cost is modest, \$50 per adult and \$25 per child, plus the expenses of the food you bring to prepare.

To register or get more info, please contact Joann Malone and Pat Smith at 301-270-8082 (joann@hers.com)

# WMC CALENDAR

**WMC Meditation and Dharma Discussion:** Every Sunday evening at 7-9:15 PM, at the Buddhist Vihara at 5017 16<sup>th</sup> 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. Phone: 301-681-1036.

<[www.mindfulnessdc.org](http://www.mindfulnessdc.org)>

**WMC Newcomer Orientation and Social Time:** Last Sunday each month. The newcomers orientation is a time to ask questions about sitting and walking meditation, bells, gathas and other aspects of Mindfulness practice. Open to all, but especially for newcomers. We will meet from 6 to 7 p.m. before the regular sitting. Informal orientations can be arranged for other Sundays; call or email to arrange (contact info above).

**Mindfulness Practice Center of Fairfax (MPCF):**

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. <[www.plumvillage.org/mpcf](http://www.plumvillage.org/mpcf)>

**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. <[www.stillwatermpc.org](http://www.stillwatermpc.org)>

Also, twelve-week workshops on **Introduction to Mindfulness** and **Mindfulness at Work** are offered each year on Thursday evenings by the Still Water Mindfulness Practice Center. We also regularly sponsor or cosponsor other workshops, classes, retreats, and special events. Interested persons may join the email list and receive a weekly update of activities by sending contact information to Mitchell Ratner at 301-270-8353, or email him at: [info@StillwaterMPC.org](mailto:info@StillwaterMPC.org)

**Capitol Hill Mindfulness Practice:** Sitting meditation every morning, Monday through Friday, from 7 to 8 a.m., at the Dancing Heart Yoga Center, 221 5th St., NE, Washington, DC (just off Stanton Square near Mass Ave.). Practice evening every Wednesday from

6:15 to 7:15 p.m. at 320 G St. NE. Contact: Jim & Freddie Schrider, 202-544-0841 or <[jshrider@igc.org](mailto:jshrider@igc.org)>

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

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

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

**Arlington Mindfulness Practice:** Every first and third Sunday of the month at 7 p.m. Sitting meditation, singing and outside walking meditation (weather permitting). In February, at 4907 S. 29<sup>th</sup> Rd, #B2 (Holly Berman, 703-671-9152). In March, at 4309 S. 35<sup>th</sup> Street (Peter Guerrero, 703-820-1524).

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

**Being Peace: Days of Mindfulness** at the Mindfulness Practice Center of Fairfax (MPCF), with resident teachers 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. 29., Oct. 27., Nov. 24.**

The Mindfulness Practice Center of Fairfax (MPCF) also hosts **two weekend retreats a year at Charter Hall Retreat Center**. The next retreat will be **Dec.7-8**. Contact the MPCF for more information: 703-938-1377.

**Mindfulness Days with the Boat of Compassion (Thuyen Tu),** 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.