

FALL 2016

# vajrabell

*spreading the dharma  
keeping sangha connected*

## The Path of Practice:

### *Some 'Divinity Shaping Our Ends'*

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### *The Dance of the Dharma*

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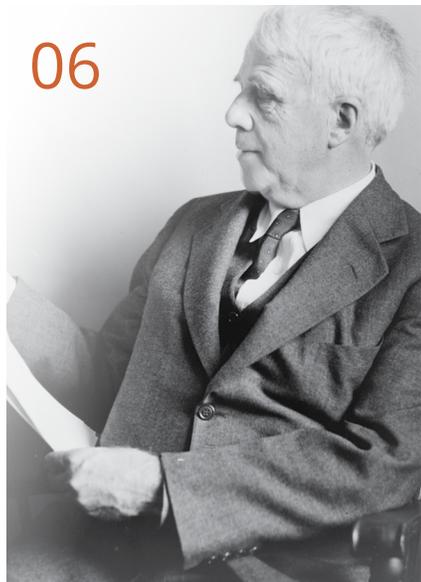
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# arts at aryaloka

## The Stitchfold Path: *'Coloring the Buddha' Quilt Show*

The next exhibit in the art gallery at Aryaloka will be textile artwork created by Akashavanda. This show will feature a collection of quilts that celebrate the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha through vibrant color and a bit of sparkle. Akashavanda loves playing with color and texture to translate traditional Buddhist images and symbols into a contemporary rendering. Beginning October 10, the

show continues through November 14 with an artist reception Saturday, November 5, from 3 to 5 p.m.

Akashavanda made her first quilt seven years ago after her first grandson was born. She had not sewn anything since high school but was immediately hooked on quilting. Her love of fabrics and color is apparent in her quilt creations. Buddhist practice informs her art. She says that

meditation develops the patience and mindfulness she needs to do the detailed sewing, and the practice of dana inspires her to make and donate quilts to charity. She quilts for fun and to explore new and interesting ways to express her faith and love of the Dharma using fabric.

Viewing times are Monday through Friday 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

— Deb Howard

## Arts Study Group: *Zen and Creativity*

*"The creative process, like a spiritual journey, is intuitive, non-linear and experiential. It points us toward our essential nature, which is a reflection of the boundless creativity of the universe."*

— Daido John Looi

The Art Study Group continues to meet every Friday morning in Exeter, NH, looking into the illusive connections between Dharma, art and meditation.

Daido Looi's remarkable book *The Zen of Creativity: Cultivating Your Artistic Life* has given us numerous opportunities for lively discussion. Some highlights include the "Seeing with the Whole Body and Mind" chapter where we looked at the merging of subject/object, seer/seen, of self and the other, "the essential experience of enlightenment."

Recently, we looked at a more practical lesson in the "Jeweled Mirror" chapter: how to develop a creative feedback group where the audience can express their feelings for artwork – not ideas, criticism or opinions – and learn how to hear what is said and stay with the direct experience.

Group participants who are not visual artists find it refreshing that Looi's words resonate with those who have movement, poetry and meditation practices as well. Looi's words shed light on various elements that anchor our creative side in the world. His work "dissolves the barriers between art and spirituality and opens up the possibility of meeting life with spontaneity, grace and stillness."

Future chapters consider those "Barriers" as well as "Zen Aesthetics," "Expressing the Inexpressible" and "The Dancing Brush." If you

would like to participate, read the upcoming chapter and bring comments and questions for discussion.

Contact Kiranada: [kiranada@myfairpoint.net](mailto:kiranada@myfairpoint.net) or Deb Howard: [dshoward1@aol.com](mailto:dshoward1@aol.com) for specifics about the chapter schedule and meeting times. We meet through early winter, finishing our last chapter "Indra's Net" on December 13.

— Dh. Kiranada

# The Triratna Path of Practice

A Comprehensive Approach to Spiritual Development

## **Spiritual Receptivity**

No More Effort:

spontaneous compassionate action

*Just sitting meditation*

## **Integration**

Developing Peace:

getting to know oneself, bringing all one's energies together behind spiritual purpose

*Samatha, mindfulness meditations*

## **Spiritual Rebirth**

Experiencing

Freedom:

of heart and mind:

a new way of being

*Sadhana and  
Buddhanusati  
meditations*

## **Positive Emotion**

Developing Happiness:

positive connection with oneself and others; skillful or positive emotion

*Metta and Brahma Viharas  
meditations*

## **Spiritual Death**

Developing Understanding and Wisdom:

direct knowing, transformation through insight, letting go

*Insight practices*



*The Triratna Path of Practice is a comprehensive view of the whole of the spiritual life from a Buddhist perspective and represents the crystallization of a lifetime of teachings by Ugyen Sangharakshita. The Path of Practice describes the crucial elements that, taken together, compose a life of happiness, purpose, freedom, equanimity and inner peace.*

*The Vajra Bell continues its exploration of the Path of Practice. Dh. Maitreyabandhu is the author of three books on Buddhism, including The Journey and the Guide: A Practical Course in Enlightenment, regarded by many as a lively and accessible approach to the Path of Practice. He graciously accepted our invitation to contribute on this topic, and gave us permission to publish a piece he wrote for The London Buddhist, a publication of the London Buddhist Centre. Dh. Lilasiddhi takes a closer look at Spiritual Receptivity, Rebirth and Spontaneous Compassionate Response.*

— Editors

# Some 'Divinity Shaping our Ends'



By Dh. Maitreyabandhu

*The interest, the pastime, was to learn if there had been any divinity shaping my ends and I had been building better than I knew.*

— Robert Frost in a preface to a selection of his poems, 1942

Other people's confidence can astound me. They often seem to know who they are and what their life consists of. They know what they want and why they want it. They can come up with ready-made opinions about war and global warming. Of course, to meet me, I'm much the same.

But if I'm honest with myself, I can't decide. As life changes – as moods, locations and other people change – I change, too. My estimation of myself fluctuates. My self-sense changes depending on who I'm with. Despite nearly 30 years of Buddhist practice I still don't really know who I am, what life is, or what I really think. Of course I know myself in the everyday sense, but when I look more deeply, the wires of motivation run off into the dark. What I thought was truth turns out to be the skewed thinking of a bad mood. What I'd taken to be aspiration was merely a passing bright idea.

So Robert Frost's poem "A Masque



Poet Robert Frost

of Reason" resonates with me. In the poem, when Job meets God in heaven, he says to his wife:

*Here's where I lay aside  
My varying opinion of myself  
And come to rest in an official verdict.*

This must be one of the attractions of God – a dream of perfect objectivity, in which someone can finally tell us: "This is what you're like. This is your true worth. This is what your life has really been about."

Christianity tends to locate meaning outside the self in this way – all true meaning comes from God. The poetry of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Welsh

poet, George Herbert, for instance – whose beautiful plainspoken verse anticipates Frost's – is a conversation with God. A Herbert poem is a well-swept room in which he meets Divinity (here in the guise of "Love"):

*Love bade me welcome: yet my  
soul drew back,  
Guilty of dust and sin.  
But quick-ey'd Love, observing me  
grow slack  
From my first entrance in,  
Drew nearer to me, sweetly  
questioning,  
If I lack'd any thing.*

—"Love (III)" by George Herbert

# For Frost the self is something our understanding never fully apprehends. The real self – whatever that is – is always on the other side of some sort of barrier, so that we only ever experience it partially, indirectly.

Herbert's "yes" to divinity, to the presence of God, has been replaced in many parts of the world by our "no." The result is an increasing polarity between religious fundamentalism on one hand and an increasingly strident, dogmatic secularism on the other. In modern liberal democracies many people believe there is no meaning, or else that the only meaning is to be found in me – in my family, my money, my career. In a world without meaning the obvious thing to do is to have as much fun as possible before the lights go out.

Frost was born in 1874, and so grew up at a time of increasing religious doubt. The old theistic certainties were dying, and God was leaving the world. Frost's mother, Belle, was a devout Scottish immigrant. His father William – a hard-drinking, volatile disciplinarian – was a skeptic. William Frost died of tuberculosis when Robert was 11, leaving his wife and children almost destitute. After the funeral was paid for, Belle had just eight dollars left in the bank.

In later years Frost described his religious journey as starting with Presbyterianism, then moving on via Unitarianism to following Swedenborg, and finally to nothing. And yet a good friend in Frost's last decades said that the poet "liked to play down his religious sense of things." His poetry, throughout his career, maintained a difficult balance

between his mother's faith and his father's skepticism.

So Frost wants to have it both ways. There's something teasing about his poetry: an unwillingness to come out and make a definite statement, a dislike of certainties – religious and secular. He once wrote in a letter, "I had had a lover's quarrel with the world." He meant a quarrel between affirmation and denial. His poem "For Once, Then, Something," for instance, is about someone looking into a well and seeing only his own reflection – "Looking out of a wreath of fern and cloud puffs."

The poem is about how, when we look at life, what we see is our own egotism reflected back at us. In the poem, this reflection is "godlike," i.e. inherently inflated and self-dramatizing, a church ceiling from which a bearded creator gazes down through swirls of musical angels and sun-struck cloud. But then, one day he seems to see "beyond the picture, / Through the picture, a something white, uncertain, / something more of depths..."

But then it's gone. The poem ends:

*What was that whiteness?  
Truth? A pebble of quartz? For  
once, then, something.*

The poem refuses to commit. Was it "Truth" he saw, or nothing but "A pebble of quartz?" All Frost can affirm is his experience that for once there was something. He can't believe in the certainties of God and yet at

the same time he gently satirises the self as essentially self-centered and therefore devoid of meaning. Which only leaves us with that nebulous something. In this poem, as elsewhere, Frost refuses to drift into metaphysics – into speculating about God or no-God. He knows that when we do that, we lose our grip on direct experience and get tangled up in reified abstractions.

When I first started reading Frost I wasn't especially impressed. Homely narratives about repairing fences or swinging from birch trees didn't seem especially poetic or even meaningful. But as I read, the poems seemed to mean all sorts of things – even contradictory things – at the same time, like figures in a dream. On one level Frost's poems are apple-pie stories of rural New Hampshire; on another they are about everything. They manage to be both specific and universal – "like some valley cheese, local, but prized everywhere," as W.H. Auden put it.

Frost's poems are about living in the world, about doing stuff. He was not a religious poet, and yet he wouldn't repudiate religion. He wouldn't say "no" outright to the idea of divinity, even while he couldn't quite say "yes." He knew that in writing a poem you can discover meanings you didn't know you were capable of. He knows you can find a meaning that, as he

- *Divinity, continued on page 8*

wrote in the preface I've quoted at the top of this article, "it might seem absurd to have had in advance, but it would be all right to accept from fate after the fact."

When I interviewed the poet Glyn Maxwell for a poetryEast event at the London Buddhist Centre he told me his poems were more religious than he was. The same could be said about Frost.

One notebook entry of Frost's reads, "There is such a thing as sincerity. It is hard to define but it is probably nothing but your highest liveliness escaping from a succession of dead selves." This gets to the heart of Frost's poetry: "highest liveliness" is only achieved by the sloughing off a "succession of dead selves."

For Frost the self is something our understanding never fully apprehends. The real self – whatever that is – is always on the other side of

be divined for Herbert. It is uncanny, occult, mysteriously hidden inside all our actions including our thoughts. It is not the man or woman who sits down to write.

For Herbert, then, the source of truth, beauty and goodness is from above: God. For Frost, meaning is discovered below or beyond the poets' everyday sense of themselves. Both these metaphors are on to something, but neither should be taken literally. One of the reasons that Frost won't deny the religious sense must be because the meaning he discovered in writing a poem seemed inherent – a meaning he had uncovered, not a meaning he had constructed.

Frost's poetry struggles again and again with the question: do we or do we not live in a meaningful universe? Many of his greatest poems portray the human being as a meaning-making machine in the midst of a

in *Robert Frost: A Life*. There's even a wonderful poem called "West-Running Brook," that metaphorically explores just that.

The sense that the source of meaning is neither impersonal and supernatural (God) or intimate and psychological (me) but that somehow transcends those distinctions, seems highly evocative and intuitively right. The notion that my motivations lie outside or beyond or below my everyday consciousness chimes with my experience.

Of course I'm aware that for Buddhism there's no such thing as a really existing self or soul. But my experience is that there is such a thing as inherent meaning. This meaning feels both intimate and personal, and, at the same time, universal, as if there is a kind of consciousness in which the personal and the universal are no longer at odds.

**Largely what I experience in my life is a "succession of dead selves:" the things I think I know, the stories I tell myself, the postures I adopt.**

some sort of barrier, so that we only ever experience it partially, indirectly. The "highest liveliness," which for Herbert would have been God, is for Frost buried deep within oneself, inaccessible, but refracted, hinted at in a million details of life.

Frost felt that in writing poetry the poet is given access to "the real, the deepest and sincerest bias of his will: the divinity shaping his ends," as wrote Mark Richardson in *Frost's Poetics of Control*. It is in this sense that a poet "builds better than he knows." This sincerest self has to be divined, just as the will of God had to

meanless universe:

*He thought he kept the universe alone;*

*For all the voice in answer he could wake*

*Was but the mocking echo of his own*

*From some tree – hidden cliff across the lake.*

—"The Most of It" by Robert Frost

But this is not the whole story. Frost believed that "religion and science, including scientific theories such as Darwin's evolution, were two different metaphorical ways of perceiving the same reality," according to Jay Parini

Being a Buddhist seems to me to be a way of getting closer to the meaning my life is trying to live out, its deeper pattern. This meaning has nothing much to do with my likes and dislikes, my ideas about who I am. And yet I see hints of it everywhere especially when I'm on retreat and my senses are less city-fatigued and screen-blind. At those moments I can see, in some half-conscious way, that I've been groping toward some "divinity shaping my ends," as if I had been building better than I knew.

For much of our lives we are groping our way quite blindly,

following hunches that may be intrinsic to what I'm calling our deeper pattern, or merely adventitious. Initially I trained as a nurse in Coventry. I thought I wanted to help people. But I left nursing to go to art school. On my first day of life drawing, I remember feeling that, finally, my life was on track. Later, when I arrived at the London Buddhist Centre on my bicycle, the sense of divinity was stronger than ever. Before the teacher finished introducing the meditation, I knew I was a Buddhist and always had been. Years later I started writing poetry.

Looking back, it's as though the meaning my life is wanting to live out – a meaning "it might seem absurd to have had in advance" – might be something to do with beauty and the desire to help people. But as in poetry so in life: it's never helpful to be too conscious about the deeper mythic pattern of one's life. As Frost put it, "A poet doesn't want to know too much, not while he's writing anyway. The knowing can come later." (Parini in *Robert Frost: A Life*).

This sense that our life is trying to express some deeper meaning – expressed even in apparently trivial matters – a meaning we can only half-grasp and even then only after the event, is not something I can prove or even point at. It's a *sense*. And of course we often get this sense mixed up with other more everyday hunches, hints and urges – romantic day-dreaming, fame fantasies, fate. It's not that. For most of us, the work is to distinguish, intuitively, between "some divinity shaping our ends" and the imposter, the *poseur*, the succession of dead selves.

To grasp what Frost is getting at when he talks of "some divinity shaping our ends" requires a kind of faith. One has to take it suggestively. Even the writing of poetry requires faith. You have to have faith that the sentence-sound that's just come into your head or the sight of people standing on a platform contains something mysterious and



*The Robert Frost Farm is located in Derry, NH, and was home to the poet Robert Frost and his family from 1900-1911.*

**Photo by Susan DiPietro**

meaningful that wants, indeed needs, to be said. Frost wrote, "The person who gets close to poetry, he is going to know more about the word belief than anybody else knows, even in religion nowadays." He talks about a "literary-belief," for instance, where the writer has to trust in the "thing-to-come, which is more felt than known." (Parini in *Robert Frost: A Life*)

Meaning begins with a hunch, a kind of gut instinct; it needs to be translated into words and concepts, into something you can say. But something is always lost in translation. Perhaps the best translation of our wordless sense of meaning is poetry, because poetry (at its rare best) points beyond words. Largely what I experience in my life is a "succession of dead selves:" the things I think I know, the stories I tell myself, the postures I adopt. And when it comes to writing poetry, it's hard to know if I'm Frankenstein trying to animate a dead self or if I'm in touch with – I'm tempted to say channelling – some divinity.

What has all this got to do with confidence, mine or other people's? Well, Frost gives me faith that mostly what I experience is a succession of dead selves that can't be trusted, aren't worthy of confidence – dead selves that mislead: over-used narratives, sob stories, practised opinions. He gives me faith that sometimes I can discover a more

authentic, sincere self; a self which is not, paradoxically, myself – a self that is always on the other side of a divide, below or beyond the habit of being me. That deeper self has to be discovered, winnowed from a succession of dead selves. And sometimes when I write a poem or meditate or talk to a friend or simply look at a row of trees I seem to find a – what? – a "sincerest self" (as Frost would have it), "some divinity shaping my ends?" Neither is quite right. I can only say it is something. But when I try to appropriate that something, it's already gone.

*Maitreyabandhu lives and works at the London Buddhist Centre and has been ordained into the Triratna Buddhist Order for 26 years. He has written three books on Buddhism (Windhorse Publications) including the best-selling Life with Full Attention: A Practical Course in Mindfulness. His debut collection of poetry, The Crumb Road (Bloodaxe Books) is a Poetry Book Society Recommendation. His new collection Yarn was published in 2015.*

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# The Dance of the Dharma



*Spiritual Receptivity, Rebirth and  
Spontaneous Compassionate Response*



By Dh. Lilasiddhi

The last two stages of the Triratna Path of Practice are identified as "Spiritual Rebirth," also known as "Experiencing Freedom," and "Spiritual Receptivity," also known as "No More Effort." These stages are the fruits of the earlier three stages: (1) "Integration" or "Developing Peace;" (2) "Developing Positive Emotion" or "Happiness;" and (3) "Spiritual Death" or "Developing Understanding and Wisdom."

These five stages, each with its recommended meditation forms, usually are described in a linear sequence that we can see over the arc of a dedicated spiritual career. We come to a Buddhist center, attend classes and increase our focus on the Dharma – integration. As we develop spiritual friendships, we cultivate a more open heart and happiness – positive emotion. Eventually, we experience the deeper teachings of the Dharma such as non-fixed self – spiritual death. This inevitably yields the sweet fruits of the practice – a freer, more open, relaxed self view, that includes care and concern for all other beings – spiritual rebirth.

The path flowers into spontaneous compassionate action – spiritual receptivity. At this stage, we are enlightened and awake to the reality of life. There is no more effort. Rather, there is only pure, immediate, compassionate response to the needs of beings as inspired by the archetypes of the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and Enlightened Beings. To them such response is all-play-all-day for the benefit of all beings.

However in the rough and tumble of everyday life, things are not so linear. The stages overlap and interact as, two steps forward and one step back, we evolve toward peace of mind, freedom from suffering, universal compassion, wisdom and joy. When we are irritated or angry, if we mindfully recall the teachings of patience and compassion, we reenter the realm of positive emotion. When

attached to a view about politics, medicine or food choices, we feel personally attacked when someone offers a different opinion. We then feel driven to defend our opinions and sense of self. This is suffering.

But if, at such times, we recall teachings of non-self – spiritual death – we remember there is really no self to defend, no right or wrong view. They are all just words and concepts. Breathing this in, we free ourselves from the claws of a fixed self-view and return to fearlessness and equanimity. We are reborn in this moment and the next; each moment offering a new possibility for freedom and joy.

To use the Buddha's teachings in this dance of spiritual evolution, we must first be receptive to the teachings. We must study the Dharma, reflect on and discuss the teachings with others. If we do this regularly and consistently, the lessons and practices are more easily accessible in the midst of suffering. Recalling the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha frequently during the day keeps the teachings on ready alert to be called upon when needed. We simply need to be open to their loving promise to transform our mental states, soften our hearts and enable us to live without fear. When we feel free in the Dharma, non-selective compassion is our spontaneous play. Receptivity, rebirth into positivity and compassionate response to the needs of all beings are the dance of the Dharma.

### **Spiritual receptivity – what is it and how do we develop it?**

Spiritual receptivity begins with mindfulness of our body, speech and mind, being aware of the messages we receive from these sources throughout the day. We need to recognize negative and positive feelings (vedana); the wafts of envy, irritation, joy, goodwill and contentment that propel our thoughts, emotions and behaviors.

We must be receptive to all things and people for their own sake,

not just for their usefulness to us. We must listen and look deeply, creatively. We take in the whole person, not just the last irritating thing we think they said. We recall their circumstances, needs, fears, pain, joys and generosity. We are receptive to beauty, pain and impermanence in all beings, experiences and things – all with a wide-open mind and heart. We imagine the potential of Buddhahood in everyone we meet.

Receptivity requires loosening our sense of self, acknowledging that there is no fixed me. We are just a loose community of skandas, unfixed, interacting among ourselves and with the internal and external worlds, without input from our conscious mind. Our swirling thoughts, emotions, reactions and behaviors shoot off in all directions, interacting with the same stuff from others who are neither separate from nor other than ourselves.

Open and receptive, we can admit that, really, "I don't know anything for sure. I don't have anything forever. And I sure don't understand the workings of the universe." Receptive to these truths passed to us by Padmasambhava, we feel relief. There is freedom in this humility. We are free from the relentless busyness of doing, fixing and achieving. Why not then opt for positivity, for the freedom the Buddha promises, and for the practices he says will lead us to freedom?

Whether or not we always believe that enlightenment is possible, that non-self (anatta) is true, or that there is a supra-personal force (Dharma Niyama) guiding our spiritual evolution, doesn't matter. We take the teachings on as skillful means. We suspend disbelief as we do when we read a novel or watch a movie. We let the teachings wash over us, warm our hearts and relieve our fears. We act as if there is a built-in tendency to enlightenment, as if there is a force such as the Dharma Niyama drawing us toward the perfect union of wisdom and love. We assume that the

- *Dharma continued on page 12*

- *Dharma* continued from page 11

Buddha was right. We surrender to his mysterious promise that is beyond the reach of our reason.

We adopt a faithful attitude. Faith is useful. Belief, in the sense of affirming unprovable doctrine, is unnecessary. Ratnaghosa, a Triratna order member, in a talk on creative listening, describes the development of faith this way:

*Our faith in the Dharma is... initially an intuition, there is a response in us, something resonates with our experience. It feels true. Later, after some practice, we know that it works from our own experience. And*



**We are all struggling with the human condition, interacting, influencing and conditioning each other, all for the sake of good, if we choose. If not, not.**

*reasoning from this, we can deduce that even more is possible.*

What have we got to lose?

Eventually the Dharma proves itself to all who practice diligently with an open heart and mind. As we receive the teachings into our hearts, the boundaries of self loosen. We recognize we are not separate from all others. We are all struggling with the human condition, interacting, influencing and conditioning each other, all for the sake of good, if we choose. If not, not.

We fear less. We drop our defensive need to protect this separate self, who never really was, who has been anxiously competing so long for status, recognition, achievement and love. We instead fall in love with the Dharma. We entrust ourselves to its promises. We say and grow into, "I entrust myself to the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha." May we

reap the rewards!

### **Just sitting meditation**

The meditation practice associated with spiritual receptivity is "just sitting." After each sit of structured practice, be it Mindfulness of Breathing, the Brahma Viharas, Buddhānussati (contemplation of the Buddha) or Sādhanā (visualization), we just sit to absorb the effects of the practice. In this form of receptivity, we yield to the effects of the meditation, inviting and allowing them to transform us.

We simply attend to whatever arises. Pleasant or painful, we don't turn away. We open to it all – anxiety, ill will, joy, contentment, fear, anger. It can be scary, terrifying or even boring. We turn toward the feeling with kindly acceptance. We feel experiences in our bodies. Eventually (I am told!), the mind no longer identifies with the content of thoughts, emotions and

stories. We recognize them as mere concepts, views and words, restricted by the limits of human reason, incapable of explaining the whole truth. They no longer hold us, and we are free from attachment. There is only the experience of awareness.

### **Spiritual rebirth into freedom and compassion**

We can be reborn every day, every moment, if we have received the teachings and developed faith and confidence in their efficacy. We keep them near to heart and mind throughout our day. We call on them to relieve our suffering and the suffering of others. When contact occurs and vedāna arises, if we let it, habitual reactivity will take over and push us to unskillful reactions. However, in that merciful gap between stimulus and our response, we can choose compassion, recall impermanence, or remember there

“With repetition, the neural path to skillful responses gets wider, stronger and more accessible every time we use it. Exercise it, and spiritual rebirth is always at hand.

is no fixed self to protect or defend. We recall a teaching, open our hearts and minds, and are receptive to its influence.

We then can be reborn out of craving, aversion or ignorance. These opportunities for rebirth arise all the time. That's why we must develop mindfulness of mental states. The more we are mindful of contact and the development of vedana – the more we reach for the teachings of the Dharma, receive its positive influence and exercise skillful responses – the stronger that neural circuit becomes. As neurobiologists often say, “Neurons that fire together, wire together.” With repetition, the neural path to skillful responses gets wider, stronger and more accessible every time we use it. Exercise it, and spiritual rebirth is always at hand.

Maitrayabandhu in his book, *The Journey and the Guide*, defines rebirth as the moment when wisdom becomes compassion. When we become aware of the conditions in any experience, when we see wisely without the filters of greed, ill will or delusion, when we reach for the inspiration of the Dharma, compassion spontaneously arises. Our hearts and minds shed the hard tortoise shell of self. We reach out to others, knowing there are no others. Our hearts get lighter. There is joy. We are reborn and get a glimpse of a purer land.

### Spontaneous compassionate activity

Our daily experiences of spiritual receptivity and spiritual rebirth have a cumulative and purifying effect. The more we recall the teachings, open our hearts and minds and respond with compassion to whatever arises, the less room we have for greed, ill will and delusion and their unskillful products.

In the formal linear presentation of the Triratna Path of Practice, our Dharmic evolution proceeds through the four stages of integration, positive emotion, spiritual death and spiritual rebirth. Our spiritual evolution then flowers in the fifth stage of spiritual receptivity and spontaneous compassionate response to all that is, in worlds seen and unseen.

Spiritual receptivity becomes a spontaneous response with no intervention of will or effort. Over the arc of a dedicated spiritual career, these stages are evident. But here, in day to day samsara, with our noses pressed between the calendar and to-do list, we navigate this journey in our own messy way with humiliating backslides and experiences of energizing inspiration.

No matter. Conditioned co-production, the core teaching of the Buddha, teaches us that every effort to move toward the Dharma, to respond to the world with love, has a positive result. All we have to do is keep on keeping on, and we shall arrive, refreshed and awakened.



*Lilasiddhi began her Buddhist studies in 2004 and was ordained into the Triratna Buddhist Order in Spain in 2012. She teaches introductory Buddhism and mitra classes, leads workshops and co-leads Noble Silence retreats at Aryaloka Buddhist Center. Her personal practice emphasizes study and meditation. Her Buddhist name – Lilasiddhi – means “spiritual and mundane accomplishment through play.” She relishes the idea that relief from suffering, joy, freedom and happiness are all available on the Buddhist path.*

# sangha notes

## Keeping Sangha Connected

ARYALOKA SANGHA  
(NEWMARKET, NH)

### Retreats

The theme for Aryaloka's summer retreats was stillness. Retreatants joined Amala for five days for various meditations and introspection in July. Bodhana, Karunasara and Lilasiddhi led the 10-day "Intensive Noble Silence" retreat, and Lilasiddhi and Sunada led a three-day "Introduction to Noble Silence." In both retreats, participants dived into literal and spiritual silence. Khemavassika led "Silence and Stillness," a one-day retreat for people building a meditation practice.

### Special Events

Kavyadrishti had a busy summer! She led a series of "Summer Evenings on the Porch with a Poem" where participants shared and meditated upon Buddhist poetry. Aryaloka hosted a book launch for Kavyadrishti's *Becoming a Buddhist*, a

collection of poetry illuminating her journey into Buddhism. Vidhuma gave a reprise of his popular lecture, "Mindfulness and Health."

### Sangha Picnic

More than 30 Sangha members (and several dogs) braved a sunny August afternoon and gathered for the annual Sangha Picnic on the back lawn of Aryaloka. As always there were copious amounts of food, including some vegetarian burgers, the recipe for which Elizabeth Hellard worked on for weeks. Those in attendance walked barefoot in the grass or lolled on the hillside talking about the Dharma and the Red Sox. As often happens, many of our well-fed Sangha members took home leftovers.

### Friends' Night

During the Friends' Night late summer series, Elizabeth Hellard led our introductory sessions on Buddhist ethics, meditation, wisdom, devotional

practice and history. Tom Gaillard and Barry Timmerman led a study of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness to enhance the application of mindfulness off the cushion. Arjava led "No Self, No Problem," a series of discussions aimed at letting go of ego and boosting our compassion.

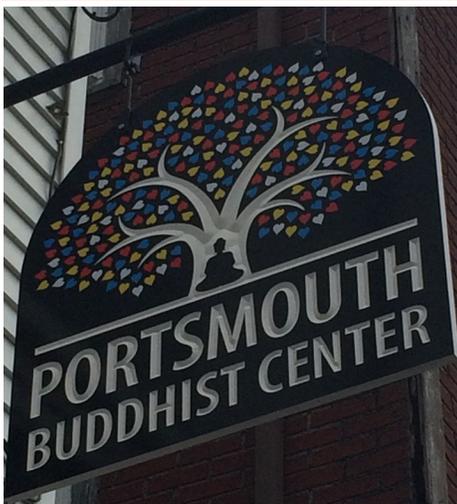
— Peter Ingraham



*Lilasiddhi, Ralph Phipps, Wally Stevens and Paul Dupre relax on the back lawn of Aryaloka after a delicious meal during the Sangha Picnic.*

PORTSMOUTH BUDDHIST CENTER  
(PORTSMOUTH, NH)

*A new sign welcomes friends and Sangha members at the Portsmouth Buddhist Center.*



The Portsmouth Buddhist Center is on a mission to become a more visible, impactful member of our local community and of Triratna on the New Hampshire seacoast. A big step in that direction is a new sign over our center door on Pleasant Street in Portsmouth, NH. It is based on a logo design by Rijupatha and made possible by the generosity of Suzanne Woodland. We thank both of them for their contributions.

We had a mitra ceremony in July celebrating the commitment of Camilla (Patience) Lendefield, our newest mitra. We look forward to

welcoming two more women mitras in the fall.

Our Sunday morning community gatherings this summer brought quite a few new faces into the center, especially with the series on ethics, meditation and wisdom led by Rijupatha. In late August and September, Viriyagita led a Sunday series on the Three Jewels with support from Bettye Pruitt.

We also have had a couple of successful and fun Meditation & Art events hosted by Narottama and friends at the Button Factory in Portsmouth. One of these workshops, co-hosted by Patience, took place

# sangha notes

## NAGALOKA SANGHA (PORTLAND, ME)

Dharmasuri, the Nagaloka Center Chair, took the summer off from her center responsibilities for a month-long trip to the UK for Triratna, a visit with our dear friend Maitrimani and a solitary retreat. A big thank-you goes to Janet Miles, Tom Handel and Matt Holden for coming forward to keep our regular scheduled meditation and Dharma bite sessions going. We also appreciate visitors like Khemavassika, Narottama and others who periodically help support our small center.

Dharmasuri attended the International Council meeting at Adhishthana – representing the movement (centers) for North America – and the Mixed and Women's Order Conventions.

Continuing on with what she started in July, Dharmasuri begins a new session on the mitra's Foundation Year in September. Narottama and Khemavassika will lead a mitra study session on the third Saturday of every month from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.. Mitras from New Hampshire are welcome to attend.

Nagaloka has been honored with a financial award from the Growth Fund offered by Triratna Development to

over Labor Day weekend, with the theme of "Mythology and Humankind." The artwork produced included both individual pieces and a group creation. Keep an eye on our blog and Facebook page for future workshops.

In September, we celebrated the return to our program of two favorite teachers. Suddhayu led our Thursday evening beginners' meditation course, "Mindfulness and the Buddha." Starting in October, he will lead a beginners' Buddhism course: "Medicine for the Heart and Mind."

We also welcome back Viriyalila who completed her training and certifica-



*Amala (right) and Dharmasuri (center) had a chance to visit with Maitrimani during their recent travels to the United Kingdom. Photo by Dharmasuri*

help fund a visiting order member for our Sangha. We are seeking an order member in residence for a period of three to four months during this coming winter. Please contact Dharmasuri at [dharmasuri@gmail.com](mailto:dharmasuri@gmail.com) for more details.

— Dh. Dharmasuri

tion as an acupuncturist and herbalist in September. Sadhu, Viriyalila! She is leading a six-week Sunday morning series through October on mind and mental events. If you're based in the Seacoast, you will not want to miss this.

Thanks to Laura Horwood-Benton our entire fall/winter program is beautifully designed and is now available as a PDF online at [TheBuddhistCentre.com/Portsmouth](http://TheBuddhistCentre.com/Portsmouth).

— Bettye Pruitt

## CONCORD & BERLIN SANGHAS (CONCORD, BERLIN, NH)

Attendance continues to be strong at both the Concord State Prison for Men weekly Saturday meditation group and Thursday study group. A four-week meditation course held this summer was well attended by newcomers interested in learning about meditation. The more experienced meditators offered support and suggestions on how to meditate in a noisy, stressful environment, and how to set up a meditation space given the limited personal space available.

The men have taken on projects to support others interested in learning about Buddhism. They have created a brochure that gives an overview of Buddhist philosophy. They have generated a list of suggested books that they have found helpful, and created a list of resources for obtaining books and taking correspondence meditation courses.

The Sangha at the Berlin, NH, State Prison for Men meets monthly with Satyada and other volunteers from the Khanti Outreach Kula. A summer retreat offered men the opportunity to spend an entire day together to meditate and study the Dharma. It included a walking meditation in the courtyard. In reflections afterward, men commented on the change in footing on uneven ground, smells of wet grass in the shade and feelings of coolness and warmth as they moved from shade to sun, all of which helped participants stay mindful and present in the moment. Participants studied and discussed the five spiritual faculties: faith, effort, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom.

If you are interested in visiting one of the facilities or attending a retreat, please contact Satyada or Khemavassika at Aryaloka. They have been long-time Khanti Outreach volunteers and can give you more information on becoming a volunteer or attending a retreat as a one-time guest visitor.

— Susan DiPietro

# sangha notes

## TRIRATNA VANCOUVER (VANCOUVER, BC)

Our Triratna Vancouver Sangha settled into our new home with an open house event in June. We said goodbye and thanked our generous landlords of our old center. We began with blessings from our Indigenous neighbors from the Squamish nation, and we had Sangha visitors from the Indian Buddhist Society.

Our mitra numbers continue to grow. Just prior to our open house, we had a ceremony welcoming four new mitras: Farrel Janell, Stephen Flach, Osvaldo Ramirez Castillo and Dani Francis.

Our Center's activities have grown. Our weekly events include meditation sits and Dharma talks almost every day except Tuesdays and Saturdays.

Over the summer, we continued to build unity with Triratna worldwide Sangha members. We had order members as guest speakers, including Nagapriya from Mexico and Padmahara from England, giving inspiring Dharma talks. Our Buddhist friend Tuere Sala from Seattle spoke about social justice, change and the Dharma.

We also have something to share from Jan Strockl, who is in training for ordination. He toured several Triratna centers in the United Kingdom and Ireland, and put together a visual presentation to entice us to travel and meet new Sangha friends.

Our women Sangha members have begun to meet, and we participated in a Green Tara puja celebrating the Dharma with our music and voice

— *Paramita Banerjee*

## SAN FRANCISCO SANGHA (SAN FRANCISCO, CA)

The San Francisco Buddhist Center concluded Buddhist Action Month by distributing food to those in need. Sangha members bought bread, peanut butter, jelly, fruit, string cheese, and cookies, and then prepared over 100 lunches. A small group walked the streets surrounding the Center handing them out. Participants reported being amazed at the number of homeless people they encountered, homeless people whom they normally don't see. They came away inspired to make the most of this precious opportunity.

The sangha also followed Buddhist Action Month with a series of Sangha Night offerings on meditation. The series complemented the four-month training focusing on meditation that started this summer. The course included instruction, study, discussion and reflection, and was divided into four 4-week modules that will be repeated throughout the year. Students can take them all in one go, or spread them out.

The week-long July retreat at Jikoji with Paramananda engaged retreatants on multiple levels. One attendee described many opportunities to meditate and listen to Paramananda's unique way of teaching through poetry; take naps in the afternoon; swim in or sit by the pond; and enjoy the beauty of Jikoji.

Also this summer, the Center offered a day retreat featuring meditation and drawing called "Still Life, Stillness, and the Archeology of Self" with

Paramabodhi. Retreatants brought personal objects with them to the retreat, and worked with mindfulness of the body, the breath and our chosen objects. This included drawing our objects and reflecting upon them and their significance in our lives. One retreatant became familiar with a tube of (expired) toothpaste during the course of the day.

The Core Sangha retreat took place in September at "The Land" (our property) in Lake County. There were fires in parts of California again this summer, but Lake County had been unaffected so far. The retreat was called "Death and the Only Beauty that Lasts." Siddhisambhava, who was visiting from Wales, offered a rare opportunity to explore this inevitable and mysterious feature of our lives and find ways to relate to it in a healthy way. Sangha night events and a day retreat were offered on the same theme.

We offer a short guest post from Hridayashri who attended the July 4th Young Sangha retreat in Lake County:

"In early July our young Sangha group held its first retreat up at the SFBC property in Lake County. It was a way of connecting differently by being together in a new setting and context. We enjoyed meditating outside, going for walks, and dipping our feet in the kiddie pool (it was pretty warm out). It was wonderful to be able to deepen our connection as a group in that way."

— *Mary Salome*

Yes, you are all trying to develop, but you  
area also trying to develop together.

## NEW YORK SANGHA (NEW YORK CITY, NY)

This summer, we had a wonderful six-week series of Sangha night teachings on “The Beauty of Connectedness and its Challenges” by Samayasri and Vajramati. We explored Dharma teachings on interconnection and separation, how we are inherently connected and how greater awareness of this can change our lives. We looked at the feelings of content that can arise from connectedness, and how the digital world can make us more connected than ever before as well as give rise to feelings of being disconnected.

Also this summer, Savanna Luraschi led a six-week Sangha night series on “Fierce Compassion: Exploring the Seven-Point Mind Training.” Through discussion and creative exercises, we reviewed the lojong teachings, mind training practices and contemplations from 11th century Tibet. The 59 aphorisms of the training can be provocative, pithy, mysterious, and at times, quite humorous. They are designed to directly challenge the deluded mind and crack open the defended heart. As always, Savanna brought her exceptional wisdom and creativity to the teachings.

We look forward to our annual Fire Island retreat with Kamalashila October 14-16 and to visits in October from Nagabodhi and Kamalashila, both order members from the United Kingdom. If you are in New York City on a Tuesday night, you are welcome to join us.

— Gary Baker

## BOSTON SANGHA (BOSTON, MA)

The Boston Sangha is pleased to welcome another mitra! Lisa Lassner joined our ever-widening circle this past spring. We are a small Sangha, and this was our first mitra ceremony held in Boston. So many Sangha members, who otherwise might not have had the chance, were able to attend and participate.

Lisa shared some of her thoughts, a wonderfully poignant reflection on spiritual friendship, and the idea of “showing up” for each other:

“This weekend I had my mitra ceremony. It brought up a lot of discomfort. The reason is that I was getting ‘mitrafied’ by myself. This meant that our meditation, short puja and the ceremony were all for my sake and that felt, well, very uncomfortable.

“I’m the kind of person who is sometimes dramatic and seizes the spotlight. I am happy to perform, but for some reason, being singled out is really hard for me. The ceremony was done in the round, so people were looking at me while I was being talked about. It felt kind, but I also had a feeling of aversion, of desperately wanting a crowd to hide in.

“Then the ceremony happened, and afterward I got hugs and kind wishes. Most profound was people telling me it was an honor for them to attend. Today that sunk in – that because I did my ceremony with my Sangha, instead of on retreat, I was able to let them show up for me. And as the

day has progressed I’ve been thinking about what that means.

“Sanghas (and other spiritual communities), families and friendship circles are formed partially so we have people who can show up for us. This is incredibly important when you are going through something tough. These people, your support network, give their attention to you in the form of listening, in the form of aid, in the form of touch and kindness. But only showing up for the hard parts means seeing only a small window of your life.

“Weddings, graduations, birthday parties – these sorts of events aren’t just social occasions. And in the best relationships we show up for these activities not just out of duty, but because we genuinely want to ‘show up’ for this person; to engage in whatever part of their life they are willing to share with us. That kind of connection is precious, and having those windows open to us is an honor.

“Although being the center of attention was hard for me on Sunday, I now understand why we have these ceremonies and why the others stayed for it.”

May we all find joy and comfort in Sangha like Lisa clearly has. Saddhu Lisa!

— Dh. Sunada

## Not only that, you are also helping one another to develop.

— Sangharakshita, What is The Sangha?  
The Nature of Spiritual Community

# sangha notes

## ROCKY MOUNTAIN SANGHA (MISSOULA, MT)

It is such a blessing to live in a place that has such easily accessible, nature-inspired things to do. Yellowstone and Glacier Parks are a fairly short drive away along with more backpack and hiking opportunities than one person could do in a lifetime. Many of our Sangha friends enjoy doing these activities together.

We continue to hold mitra study classes on Tuesdays and Thursdays, open Sangha night every Wednesday and a practice day once a month. We have added Monday morning meditation with the possibility of adding more mornings a week.

Seattle, Vancouver and Missoula held their annual Sun Lakes Retreat September 22-25 in Central Washington. The retreat was led by Amala with the theme "Of and Beyond The Six Great Elements."

Dhammarati, order member from the UK, will make his annual visit in October. Karunakara was in the UK – his first trip to Adhithana – on order conventions and retreats for two months, and we look forward to him sharing his experiences with us.

I returned home in July from my ordination retreat at Akashavana, the women's retreat center in Spain. The opportunity to do this was made



possible by many amazingly generous people who supported me in many ways – spiritually, emotionally, logistically and financially. I am forever grateful.

This was the 10th year of the three-month ordinations that have been held at Akashavana. I must say they know how to support and care for you, in all ways, through the process. It is a remote center in the mountains of Spain that has the most incredible views for miles. The vultures and ibex and other wildlife are constant companions. It is a magical, mystical and

*Samatara (center) was ordained in Spain on a three-month ordination retreat. With her are her private preceptor Padamatara (left) and her public preceptor, Parami.*

spiritual experience and place.

For those in the ordination process, I highly recommend that you consider this longer retreat when the time comes. There were 21 women living together for three months in amazing harmony. This would have been nearly impossible without the three order members on the support team living close by. It was a beautiful way to start my life in the Triratna Buddhist Order.

*— Dh. Samatara  
Her new name which means  
"radiance of equanimity"*



*Samatara often visited an old homestead as her "go to" spot for contemplation not too far from the retreat center where she was ordained in Spain.*

**Photo by Samatara.**

# sangha connections

## *Conversations with Triratna Order Members*

### *Dh. Padmatara: 'Participating in something bigger than me'*

*Padmatara lives in the San Francisco Buddhist Center with her dog Rilky.*



by Bettye Pruitt

Padmatara spoke from the sitting room in her second-floor apartment in the San Francisco Buddhist Center (SFBC)

with her dog Rilky nearby. Her dry, self-deprecating humor makes her down-to-earth reflections on life and practice all the more powerful. You can get a taste of her reflections and humor from her 2008 talk on Free Buddhist Audio: "Ethics and Speech: What am I Trying to Say?"



#### **Connecting with Triratna**

Padmatara (Sheila Bagley) confesses she came around to the Triratna Buddhist center in Brighton, U.K., to learn meditation as one more effort in a long line of efforts to stop smoking. She was in her early 30s. Born in Sunderland in the northeast of England, she had come to Brighton at age 18 to go to university. She was shy and suffered culture shock in the move to Brighton, especially from the difficulty people had in understanding her Sunderland accent. By then, she had changed how she talked and was looking to change some habits she had brought from Sunderland: smoking, drinking and partying.

A book on meditation recommended she find a teacher and other people to practice with. "I was reluctant," she said, "but then I went to a meditation class and fell in love with the whole thing." She was "a bit dismissive" of anything to do with religion, but Buddhism felt like a good fit.

"A lot of people say this, but it was a lot like coming home to something

I'd always known," she said. "That first class I thought I'm going to get ordained, and this is my whole life now. It changed my life, realigned things for me."

Having been mildly depressed in her 20s, she said, "it was the first time I'd experienced not being depressed, or not having that as a background experience. It had a big, big effect on me. But I did nothing to change my life. I was still going out drinking. I didn't even give up smoking, as it happened."

For a few years she took courses and went on a couple of retreats, but did not ask to become a mitra. She laughed: "I didn't even know who Sangharakshita was! I was going to Sangha night on and off, but I didn't tell anyone about it, not even my parents. I just had this idea it would be an important part of my life in the future."

In 1993, Sheila moved to San Francisco with the company she was working for: AH Prismatic. "It stood for Aging Hippie Prismatic. We sold ho-

lographic gift items – the ultimate useless item." The company's operations were a mess, and she had to work hard. Yet, she felt at home in San Francisco. "It was probably the loneliest I'd ever been, and I still loved the place." AH Prismatic went bankrupt, but by then Sheila had met somebody and wanted to stay in the US. She needed a visa, so they married.

At about the same time, Sheila found Triratna again through the San Francisco Buddhist Center in the winter of 1997-98. Having lost her job, she had more time on her hands and started attending regularly. "I became a mitra almost right away. I really wanted to have that structure to help me. I realized, because of the long gap, that I really do need Sangha. Otherwise I may think I'm practicing but then I turn around and it's been weeks since I've even thought about it. That was a big change for me to say, 'I am committed to this.'"

She asked for ordination in 2001. "When Suvarnaprabha was invited

*- Connections continued on page 20*

# sangha connections

- *Connections continued from page 19*  
to be ordained, it was the first time I ever really understood what mudita is. She was so happy, and I felt so happy for her. So I asked for ordination." Sheila's marriage ended about the same time, and she moved to the San Francisco Buddhist Center into an apartment she shared with Suvarnaprabha for the next 12 years.



*Padmatara took over as center director in San Francisco in 2010.*

## Experience of ordination

Padmatara received her private ordination and her name (which means Lotus Star) in 2005 at Vajrapani retreat center near San Francisco.

"I remember thinking it didn't make any difference, in a way," she said, and explained, "In the last stages of the ordination process, my preceptor, Dayanandi, suddenly had some doubts about me. That was painful and also quite helpful, because it made me think what would I do if those doubts are right? And I thought,

well, I wouldn't do anything different. I'd just be doing the same thing. So in a way it doesn't matter whether the order is there or not; I will be practicing somehow. That thought changed things for me."

Letting go of the outcome a bit, she saw how the process had become "all about ordination. It had just seemed important that I get ordained: 'I want it over with. I don't always want to be in this position.' Then I just let go of it. And then I got ordained shortly after that."

Padmatara went into her ordination thinking it was "just a personal commitment," based on "the fact that I was so sure that this was where my life was and this was what I wanted to do with my life." She liked the idea of having a ceremony to mark that commitment.

"But then in the private ordination, it really was like time stood still. Dayanandi gave me the precepts and gave me

my name. I did actually feel like I was part of a long line making that commitment, and not just our tradition particularly. It felt timeless somehow. So that was really lovely."

Her public ordination with three other women and three men took place at the San Francisco Buddhist Center. "It was a huge event, a big kerfuffle," said Padmatara. When Dayanandi announced her name "all sorts of people who had come from all over were cheering. It was very un-English. But it made me realize that, yes, it was a great experience for me, but it wasn't just about me. I was participating in something bigger than

me, which is kind of what we are doing, isn't it? Or what we realize more as we practice."

Recently, Padmatara performed her first ordination as a new private preceptor. "It took me right back to my own ordination and completely reinspired me again," she said. "I hadn't realized that I needed that. I saw that talking about ordination intellectually, thinking about it and that sort of thing don't really mean that much. . . There's something more. It's like that emotional understanding that Sangharakshita talks about: it makes sense on a visceral level – a sort of outside of time-and-space level – in a way that when you're just talking about it, can sound a bit precious, which I don't like. But it was a precious experience."

## Current practice: striving to not strive

"The work I'm doing now, if I could sum it up," Padmatara said, "would be something like trying to include all of my experience and finding the subtle ways in which I avoid including parts of my experience. It's very much about the body and being aware of experience in and around the body – kind of unhooking from thinking and not relying so strongly on that small part of us that thinks all the time. It's just having some trust in the rest of our experience."

It's not that thinking isn't useful, she said. "We just don't need to rely so heavily on our thinking, on our ability to work things out and plan and remember and get everything logically straight. We can actually rely on some other kind of awareness. When I am able to do that, it's just amazing."

She called up a favorite image of "veils dropping." She'll have an experience and think, "Oh, right. Then later I'll realize that was just one level, and another veil drops away, and I'll think 'Oh, that's what that means!'"

"The other thing I'm realizing," she said, "is that things I thought were a

# Buddhaworks

the aryaloka bookstore

*Your support brightens Aryaloka's future.*

Buddhaworks is located at the Aryaloka Buddhist Center

Buddhaworks, Aryaloka's book store, has four new book titles: *No Mud No Lotus* by Thich Nhat Hahn, *The Dalai Lama's Cat* by David Michie, *Living with Kindness* by Sangharakshita and *The Journey and The Guide* by Maitreyabandu. We have received a large donation of books for the used book section, so check them out!

You also will find a new selection of pottery by artist Sue Ebbeson and other new pottery pieces not offered before. Cards by artist Eric Ebbeson are also featured. Buddhaworks is now selling cards by Deb Howard from her "Buddha" art collection.

Other items include cotton meditation shawls in several colors,

cotton "Om" scarves in numerous colors, neck and wrist skull malas, "Om Mani Padme Hum" cuff bracelets, a Green Tara singing bowl and metal door mantras that when placed over your door are said to bless and protect all who pass underneath.

— Dh Shantikirika

technique to get somewhere actually become just more of a description of what's happening. Somebody quoted to me the other day that 'Buddhism is not proscriptive, it's descriptive.' I really like that.

"For example, I think I should be with my experience, but when it starts to happen, it feels like a natural state. It's not about adding on, trying to be a good person or a better person. It's about finding out who I actually am through what is my experience, not what my experience should be. I'm just starting to see more clearly that it's not about being a better person, it's about being closer to who we actually are.

"I think about Pema Chodron saying she needs to be careful, because the minute she says, 'We need to be kind to ourselves,' somebody will say, 'Oh I'm not kind enough to myself!' That's how we tend to take things. It does take effort to not strive."

## **The practice of being a center director**

In 2010 Padmatara took over the job as San Francisco Center director from Suvarnaprabha who then became creative director. They worked closely together in those roles for a

time, before Suvarnaprabha formed her own business. They remained roommates at the center until Suvarnaprabha's death from cancer in 2013.

"We spent an awful lot of time together," Padmatara said. "She was probably the main person who encouraged me with my teaching. I would help her out on retreats and then learned to do them myself. I had to do them when she was sick. So in various ways she pushed me to do probably more than I would have done. She was very encouraging and easy going. She was a friend and roommate. We worked together, hung out, taught together. It (her death) left a big hole. Around the center every now and then we'll say why is this not happening and then we'll realize – oh, it's because Suvarnaprabha isn't here. Just that big something missing that was her. She's always very present."

Being center director is a field of practice in itself, Padmatara said. She had naturally wanted to work for the center, volunteering quite a bit. When she was laid off from her school district job and started to work more fulltime, "it finally felt like I was able to have everything I was doing be about

something that is important to me."

Now she has to push herself to get out and meet people not connected with Triratna. She takes her turn teaching all of the center's introductory classes, mitra study, Sangha nights and retreats. She also takes part in the retreats for women in the ordination process and serves on "lots of kulas."

She treats the administrative work as a practice. Should a disagreement or concern arise, she thinks, "What is this pointing to? What is my part in this?"

"Some of what I've been working with recently," she said, "is how to stay motivated. I've relied on anxiety to motivate me in the past, and I'm much less anxious now. I have to find ways to get around that."

Also, as ever, the shy woman from Sunderland is still strengthening her communication skills. When I said I would reference her talk on Free Buddhist Audio, she said, "Ha! I like to think I'm getting better at that talk."

# from the editors

## *Gaining concentration and focus puts my life in high definition mode*



by Mary Schaefer  
Co-editor, *Vajra Bell*

I recently completed reading Sangharakshita's *Living with Awareness* book for the mitra class

– as the next natural development of my meditation. *Living with Awareness* was like reading *Breath by Breath*. I could only sample a couple pages at a time as there was so much to digest and reflect upon. And, like with *Breath by Breath*, reading this book was itself

I am learning the importance of consistency and concentration in my meditation and practice of mindfulness. In some ways, though, working on concentration can be a focus on becoming proficient at a technique.

**Sangharakshita warns of having too narrow a perspective, as well as being too distracted ‘with a tendency to be over-expansive and over-flexible.’**

“The Way of Mindfulness” taught by Khemavassika. Studying this book is having a profound impact on not just my meditation but on how I bring more of the Dharma off the cushion and into my life.

I was reminded of the time I met with Paramachitta, an order member who has traveled the world for Triratna, at my first retreat for women in the ordination process at the Chintanami Retreat Centre in Mexico. We talked of my meditation practice.

I told her I was struggling with the mindfulness of breathing. It had become a trying exercise to get the form right. She encouraged me instead to just pay attention to and observe my breath, my thinking, my feelings and how they arise and fall away. That suggestion blew my meditation practice wide open. I could see that by becoming proficient at technique, I was not going to gain insight. I was free to go deeper.

She suggested that I explore the Anapanasati Sutta and Larry Rosenberg's book – *Breath by Breath*

like meditating.

One passage in particular struck me right between the eyes and gave me a view into myself that was a little uncomfortable. In this passage, Sangharakshita warns of having too narrow a perspective, as well as being too distracted “with a tendency to be over-expansive and over-flexible.” He writes: “The distracted mind tries to escape into one so broad that no one mind could ever hope to encompass it thus avoiding responsibility and commitment.”

My mind loves to be wild and creative and explore endless ideas. That tendency has been a blessing in that it feeds my creative, nonlinear mind, but it also can hamper my work and life when I find I can't pick one or two things to focus on. It's like trying to listen to three radio stations at the same time. I was startled to think that by not picking an area to go deeper into in my practice, I could be “avoiding responsibility and commitment.”

With Paramachitta's encouragement, I dived into the Anapanasati Sutta and have been studying and practicing that approach for more than three years. I began to see, as I went deeper into this practice, that I didn't become narrower and more confined. Instead, as I gain concentration and focus, my consciousness expands and my mindfulness increases. I'm more present and alive, and in those moments I feel like I've switched to a high definition participation in life.

This book opened the door to an even deeper, more refined exploration through the Satipatthana Sutta. When I'm walking, be mindful I am walking. When I am eating, be mindful I am eating and so forth. It helps me to stop (or at least briefly pause) the incessant chatter of my wildly creative and busy mind. Just be here now, really be here now with whatever I am doing. That simple. That hard.

# from the editors

## *Generosity – a way towards ending my suffering and that of others*



by David Watt  
Co-editor, *Vajra Bell*

Once a month I receive a form email acknowledging a small recurring gift I make to a group called Homeboy Industries. I consider the group's founder, a Jesuit priest named Greg Boyle, to be a living Bodhisattva for his work with gang members in Los Angeles. In his books and interviews, Father Boyle evinces realistic compassion, joy, optimism and humor in the face of great difficulty. His ideals remind me of my own father, and indeed I make that donation in my Dad's memory.

The latest email arrived while we were preparing this issue with two articles about generosity. It made me ponder how oddly we practice it nowadays. While electronic transactions allow organizations to operate efficiently, they are stripped of human interaction and ritual. No check is written. No envelope is addressed. No stamp is affixed. No postal carrier delivers it. No one cashes a check. No thank you note is written and signed. The entire transaction is carried out with no human touch or direct expression of gratitude, only computers giving and saying thank you to one another.

Yet, as I scanned the email – the wording of which never changes from month to month – I realized that only one person felt grateful for this specific donation – me! I was somehow, with no real effort, part of the conditions that gave rise to the wonderful work of this organization. The impersonal nature of the transaction didn't matter to me.

As a spiritual practice, generosity has a long, uncomfortable history. In many traditions, adherents are urged to donate to their church, temple or mosque. While this custom has surely been abused in some instances, the act of giving to one's spiritual community does have merit and can be a transcendent experience. Still, my habitual cynicism about religious institutions and my fear about having enough to meet my needs make this an uncomfortable topic and inhibit my willingness to be generous.

The Buddhist traditions can seem even more demanding than the Christian tithe. In the Bodhicaryavatara, Shantideva says, "See, I give up without regret my bodies, my pleasures, and my good acquired in all three times, to accomplish good for every being" (from *The Bodhicaryavatara*, translation by Crosby and Skilton, Oxford World Classics, 2008).

This is a lot for me to live up to. Luckily for me, there is more to these teachings than heroic renunciation. According to Shantideva, *dana* is the first of the *paramitas* and it cannot be neglected as one seeks to practice the others. *Dana* is not an edict; it is a gateway to joy that can be practiced in great and small ways. The practice of generosity reminds me of the purpose of my practice – to end my own suffering and that of others. My practice doesn't make a lot of sense without it.

I know several people who gladly give away one-third of their income or more and make lifestyle choices to make this possible. This practice is not some abstemious attempt on their part to accumulate merit; rather, it brings them joy. I am inspired that they have to some extent broken the bonds of grasping and embraced the impermanent nature of our possessions. As my own practice has deepened, I am more able and willing to be generous toward the Sangha, my family and others with whom I share this life. At the end of the day, there is really nothing I can hold on to and there is sometimes joy in letting go of what I do hold onto.

***Dana* is not an edict; it is a gateway to joy that can be practiced in great and small ways.**

# board notes



by Barry Timmerman

The Aryaloka Board of Directors met in August. We reviewed finances and discussed proposed systems to communicate the financial picture of Aryaloka to board members more succinctly and frequently. The pledge drive went well, exceeding the goal. A special thanks to all who pledged for the first time and to those who increased their pledges.

The new Friends of Aryaloka program is about creating more connections among Sangha members and with friends and helping people learn more about Aryaloka. The Friends of Aryaloka subcommittee continues to make improvements to the program, including making laminated name badges and developing a registration form.

The Sangha Care initiative is moving along nicely. Rack cards and flyers will be printed, and the interviewing and selection of volunteers is under way. Volunteer training also will be provided. We are refining the description of Sangha Care duties, and plan to roll out this project in the next month or two.

The board and the Spiritual Vitality Council are planning a one-day retreat to further enhance our skillfulness in working together. Stay tuned for further details.

All board minutes are available for review on the lower level bulletin board at Aryaloka. Do not hesitate to speak with any board member about ideas or concerns. As we move forward, there is much vitality and energy in our thriving center. It is a gift to have access to the Dharma and have such an emphasis on Sangha.

# spiritual vitality council



by Dh. Khemavassika

Aryaloka's Spiritual Vitality Council (SVC) has met monthly to discuss a wide range of topics from identifying order members interested in teaching classes at Aryaloka to how the SVC communicates within our group and out to the entire sangha. We reviewed the policy regarding teaching different groups at the

center.

The program for the second half of 2016 was reviewed with Shrijnana. We also did preliminary planning for order retreats in 2017. Our conversations continue about fostering a regional approach with other local Triratna sanghas when feasible.

Nagabodhi, the president of Aryaloka, visited in September, and succession planning was on the agenda for discussion.



## poetry corner

### A Poem That Came Quickly

by Kavyadrishti

This summer has ended,  
as they do.  
Did our hearts come as close to opening as the rose,  
who loved so surely it let every petal go?  
Did we come close to seeing what waits beyond the fog,  
or must we wait, again, to know?

Now is the time to prepare,  
for by now we argue very little  
with falling yellow leaves.  
And Winter may well again be a time for waiting.  
Perhaps in Spring a new surprise.

But now summer has ended,  
and there is more to come.

# Aryaloka's Stupa: Your Support Needed to Complete the Project

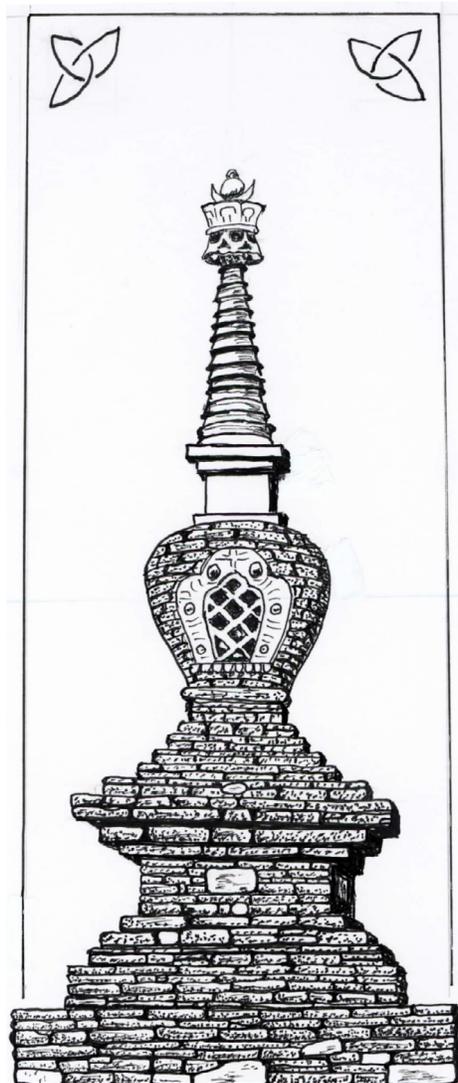


by Barry Timmerman

The Aryaloka stupa was completed two years ago, and has been enjoyed by many. We are now moving forward with plans to complete the landscaping of the grounds around the stupa, and the Stupa Kula is raising money for this final phase of the project. Cost estimates at this time are around \$30,000 for everything. The fundraising starts now, and landscaping work should begin in the spring.

Landscape architect Thomas Berger worked with the kula to create a viable aesthetic vision. The stupa will be embraced in a circular pathway with granite benches for sitting and meditating. A graceful path will lead from the domes to the grounds. The sloped area above will provide a clear view of the stupa and the river beyond. A kiosk will provide visitors with information and attractive plantings will show off the stupa while blending with the natural woodlands. Energy-efficient lighting will illuminate the steps and path for nighttime meditations.

Aryaloka's stupa began as the dream of Bodhilocana, an order member with a strong connection to Dhardo Rimpoche, one of Sangharakshita's main teachers in Kalimpong, India. Bodhilocana died before her vision was realized. However, other women order members formed a Stupa Kula, raised the needed funds, engaged a Tibetan stone mason and carried out her dream. With contributions of money, time, materials and labor from many Sangha members, the stupa was completed by the fall of 2014.



Cherish the Doctrine,  
Live United,  
Radiate Love.

-Dhardo Rimpoche

The stupa contains many sacred objects including relics of Dhardo Rimpoche, some of his ashes, mantras written by Triratna Buddhists from all over the world and other symbolic offerings. The stupa's ornamental top was made for Aryaloka in Lhasa, a city in the Tibetan region of China, along with the grille that is mounted on the east face of the stupa that encloses a Buddha rupa.

There is a powerful, palpable energy of compassion that the stupa radiates. Though it may seem unscientific to some, I do not question it. It is as real to me as my breath. I invite you to experience it for yourself and join me in paying tribute to a person who Sangharakshita considered a living Bodhisattva and a lineage that connects us directly to the Buddha.

Moving forward we have enlisted the support of sangha members to complete the practical aspects of the project. This includes everything from excavators to arranging the purchase of plants and coordinating volunteer labor to carry out the necessary work. Your financial support is needed to complete this project.

Contact Barry Timmerman, [barrystimm@comcast.net](mailto:barrystimm@comcast.net) or Tom Galliard, [tom.gaillard@gmail.com](mailto:tom.gaillard@gmail.com) for more information about how you can help.

Drawing of Stupa  
by Eric Ebbesson

# upcoming events

## OCTOBER

- 10 *Mon* The Stitchfold Path:  
to *Sat* 'Coloring the Buddha'  
05 *(Nov)* Quilt Show  
Artist: Dh. Akashavanda

## NOVEMBER

- 05 *Sat* Path of Practice: A Morning  
with the Buddhas  
Led by Dh. Amala  
  
Opening Reception:  
Quilt Exhibit  
Featuring Dh. Akashavanda
- 
- 06 *Sun* Drawing Group  
Led by Eric Ebbeson
- 
- 08 *Tue* Hourly Open Meditation  
Led by Sangha Members

## NOVEMBER

- 12 *Sat* Sangha Day  
Led by Festival Team
- 
- 13 *Sun* Deepening Practice Group  
Led by Dh. Amala and  
Dh. Khemavassika
- 
- 17 *Thu* Intensive Noble Silence  
to *Sun* Retreat  
20 Led by Dh. Bodhana and  
Dh. Karunasara
- 
- 25 *Fri* A Day of Simplicity and  
Potluck Lunch  
Led by Dh. Shrijnana
- 
- 30 *Wed* Introduction to Meditation  
to *Wed* Led by Dh. Bodhana  
21 *(Dec)*
- 
- Exploring Insight:  
Advanced Meditation  
Course  
Led by Dh. Amala

## DECEMBER

- 10 *Sat* Path of Practice:  
Spontaneous Compassionate You!  
Led by Dh. Lilasiddhi
- 
- 17 *Sat* Ancient Wisdom Study  
Day: Images and Archetypes in the Life and  
Teachings of the Buddha  
Led by Dh. Candradasa
- 
- 18 *Sun* Children's Sangha  
Led by Alisha Roberts  
  
Deepening Practice Group  
Led by Dh. Amala and  
Dh. Khemavassika
- 
- 23 *Fri* Winter Meditation Retreat  
to *Sat* Led by Dh. Suriyadamma  
31 and Dh. Sravaniya

# ongoing events

## Friends' Night at Aryaloka

Every Tuesday evening  
**6:45 – 9:15 p.m.**

- Led by Dh. Amala and other sangha members.
- Open to all
- Suggested donation \$10 per class
- No registration necessary

Typically, our Tuesday night activities include:

- 6:45 – Gathering, tea and announcements
- 7:00 – Meditation and shrine room activity
- 7:45 – Study, discussion or a talk on the evening's topic
- 9:15 – End



With these activities, you are free to participate or to just sit and listen. Nothing is compulsory. If you have any questions, please ask!

## Open Meditation Practice

Monday Morning Sessions  
**7 – 8 a.m.** and **8:30 – 10:00 a.m.**

Tuesday and Thursday Sessions  
**9 a.m. – 10 a.m.**

Are you looking for more opportunities to meditate with others or for help maintaining a regular meditation practice? Join us on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday mornings for open meditation sessions, followed by time for discussion. Everyone is welcome to attend. Some guidance will be provided for those new to meditation. The open meditation sessions will not be held when retreats are in session. There is no fee for these sessions, but donations are appreciated.

No registration required.

# upcoming classes and events

**November 23 — December 31**

## **Introduction to Meditation**

*Wednesday mornings*

10 a.m. – 12 p.m.

*Led by Dh. Bodhana*

This four-week course provides a thorough introduction to the fundamentals of sitting meditation practice. During the course, two different meditation practices will be taught: the Mindfulness of Breathing and Meditation on Loving Kindness. These are traditional Buddhist meditation techniques dating back to the time of the Buddha, although one does not need to be a Buddhist or have Buddhist beliefs to practice them.

Attention will be given to the benefits of meditation, meditation posture, and working with difficulties in meditation. There will be ample opportunity for questions and answers. This course is suitable for complete newcomers to meditation practice as well as those who have meditated previously but would like a refresher.

**November 30 — December 31**

## **Exploring Insight:**

### *Advanced Meditation Course*

*Wednesday evenings*

7 – 9 p.m.

*Led by Dh. Amala*

On this four-week course we'll explore insight meditation: how is it related to and different from calming and concentration approaches to meditation? We will also explore the Three Lakshanas ("marks") of impermanence, non-self, and unsatisfactoriness. Contemplation of the Three Lakshanas loosens our fixed sense of reality and opens us up to a more fluid sense of ourselves and the world around us. Prior experience with Mindfulness of Breathing and Metta Bhavana practices is an important basis for this class.

**Saturday, December 17**

## **Ancient Wisdom Study Day:**

### *Images and Archetypes in the Life and Teachings of the Buddha*

9 a.m. – 1 p.m.

*Led by Dh. Candradasa*

The Bodhi Tree, Lotus flowers, The Vajracheddika, Vajras. These images from the Buddha's life hold great symbolic significance. Understanding their meaning can help us awaken the spiritual qualities they represent. Join Dh. Candradasa for an exploration of key images, symbols, and archetypes in the life story of the Buddha, as expressed in Ashvaghosha's *Buddhacarita* and other early suttas. We'll use meditation, discussion, poetry, and ritual to deeply engage with these images. Emphasis will be on the role of imagination in spiritual practice.

# upcoming retreats

**November 17 — 20**

## **Intensive Noble Silence Retreat**

*Led by Dh. Bodhana  
Dh. Karunasara*

This intensive retreat creates an atmosphere conducive to extended meditation with the fewest external distractions. Retreat participants will have no responsibilities during their time here so they can focus completely on their meditation practice. An emphasis on the collective aspect of practice using the five precepts is woven into the fabric of this retreat.

**December 23 — 31**

**(option for mid-retreat arrival)**

## **Winter Meditation Retreat**

*Led by Dh. Suriyadamma  
Dh. Sravaniya*

As we enter the depths of winter we will use the opportunity of this end of year retreat to do two things: We will simply enjoy days of shared stillness, deep silence and meditation, and we will quietly reap the benefits this will inevitably bring.

For more details, such as pricing, please visit

[aryaloka.org/calendarevents/](http://aryaloka.org/calendarevents/)

To register for a retreat, day event, or a class, please visit

[aryaloka.org/programs/registration](http://aryaloka.org/programs/registration)

# generosity

## Aryaloka's Pledge Drive: Reflections on Generosity in Action



by Tom Gaillard

Aryaloka has just completed a successful annual pledge drive!

Income from this pledge drive is the bedrock for our staffing, programs and retreats. It's been incredibly satisfying to see so many people step up to financially support Aryaloka in its mission to spread the Dharma. It is truly an exercise of generosity in action.

One of the most gratifying things about being involved in the pledge drive is that I could come to know the reasons people support Aryaloka. Perhaps these quotes will inspire you as much as they did me:

*I pledge because I consider Aryaloka my spiritual home. I believe in our mission – to carry the (Dharma) message to anyone who walks in. I want everyone who walks in to have the same wonderful experience I did.*

*I give out of love – love for the people of Aryaloka, love for the Dharma, love for the center and all it provides.*

*Even though I'm new to Aryaloka and still learning, it makes me feel good to contribute to what sustains me. I feel I'm part of that power of spreading the Dharma.*

*I'm a mitra but due to my work schedule I can't attend classes or even Tuesday nights. So, giving my monthly pledge helps me feel connected.*

*It's probably the only community I've ever felt really comfortable with, and I'd like to see it grow and thrive.*

*If you belong to something, it just seems right' to pledge.*

Talking with sangha members made me consider my own reasons for putting generosity into action. As a former Aryaloka treasurer and long-time pledging member, I found (almost to my surprise) that pledging has become a habit. A good habit, perhaps, but even good habits can become, well, habitual. Habits can come to be routine, even mundane, and mundane things lose their energy. They lose their power to motivate and inspire. Our attention may then shift elsewhere toward something more captivating.

Reflecting on what this form of generosity means to me, I found that pledging strengthens my connection to the Dharma and, more specifically, its expression in the Aryaloka sangha. I've been able to deepen my practice and better understand the Buddha's message by my involvement with those I've met through Aryaloka. By studying with them, learning from them, working with them, even disagreeing with them, I've challenged

my old ways of thinking and found new perspectives and meaning in my life. Money is a powerfully tangible thing, and by giving it away through my pledge I can break my own attachment to money and connect more fully with a cause that I care deeply about.

Turning back to our pledge results, we have impressive numbers to report. Eight new donors raised their hands (and opened their wallets), so we now have 59 sangha members making monthly or annual pledges. Encouraged by a \$5,000 matching grant, those already pledging dug a bit deeper and increased their pledges by nine percent over last year. It all added up: total pledges were up a whopping 24 percent to a grand total of \$55,726!

Please join me in thanking Elizabeth Hellard, Daniel Kenney, Jean Corson, Alisha Roberts, Amala, Rijupatha, Barry Timmerman and Arjava for all their work to make this year's pledge drive so successful. The median pledge is just about a dollar a day or \$35 per month, but we welcome pledges of any amount. If you care about Aryaloka, and would like to join us, please visit <http://www.aryaloka.org/get-involved/donate-or-pledge> to make your pledge today!