

April 2006  
Issue No: 10



# Insight

Voice Of Wisdom  
*Monthly Newsletter of The Triple Gem Of The North*

## Weekly Meditation—

**Monday Evening**  
**7.00 PM to 8.30 PM**

Unitarian Universality Fellow-  
ship

937 Charles Ave.

Mankato, MN 56001

Call Tricia@ 507-524 -  
3245

## Tuesday Evening

7.00 PM to 8.00 PM

Gustavus Adolphus College

800 West College Avenue

St. Peter MN 56082

Call Raj@ 507- 933 7444

## Friday Evening

**6.00 PM to 7.30 PM**

2716 Seminary Dr

New Brighton, MN 55112

Call Ray@ 612-760-3996

## Saturday Morning

10.00 AM to 12.00 PM

Chanhassen Library

7711 Kerber Drive

Chanhassen, MN

All are Welcome

## —The Art Of Breathing—

Godwin Samararatne:

I like to welcome you once again. As you notice, the talk this evening is on focusing our attention on our in-breath and our out-breath. This is one of the most well-known and popular meditation techniques in all the Buddhist traditions. In addition, breathing mindfully helped the Buddha achieve enlightenment. So let us see why this technique is so important.

Anapanasati is the Pali word meaning mindfulness of the in-breath and the out-breath. In this meditation, the whole emphasis is on developing awareness and mindfulness. As we know, breathing takes place mechanically we just want to be more aware of it. As the whole emphasis is on mindfulness, what is very important for you to remember is that whatever is happening in our mind and body when we are practicing this technique, we should learn to just to know, just to be mindful, just to be conscious of what is happening. So when you have thoughts, please do not consider them as a disturbance or as a distraction, but rather be aware that you are having thoughts. If you are hearing sounds, you just know you are hearing sounds. So if you are feeling different sensations in the body, just know that you are experiencing different sensations. Know these things are happening, and return to your breath. There is no need to have a battle when we are meditating on this technique. I often say that you have enough battles in life, please do not make meditation another battle. The whole idea of meditation is to experience freedom, to experience joy, to experience lightness, to be free of suffering but if you make it a battle, meditation itself becomes a source of suffering. So please remember this.

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— *Emotional Rescue* —



A few days ago, a person asked me, "How can I control my feelings?"

"Why don't you like your feelings?" I replied.

"I like some feelings, but I don't like others. I want to learn how to control my feelings. Can you teach me how to do that?"

In times of difficulty, especially in emotional moments, we all ask ourselves this question. What are feelings? How do they begin? Why do we like some feelings and not others?

Experiences come to us through our senses. Our eyes let us see the world, ears relay sound, the nose picks up scents, the tongue tastes food and the skin picks up the sense of touch. Yet different experiences cause different feelings or emotions. If someone touches us, we either embrace them or recoil. We may enjoy tasting our favorite food, but not when it is rotten. The difference is what makes us happy and what makes us unhappy. When you meet a friend, you enjoy making conversation with him, but if he made you angry you might avoid him. We have to understand what makes the difference between liking and disliking a situation.

Reaction is the key. Our senses take in all the stimuli so that we can react. We can greet the same friend numerous times and each experience can be different. Even though the eyes are seeing the same image, the power of reaction alters the emotive outcome. One time we see him and we think of a compliment he made and are glad to see him as a result. A second time we remember a thoughtless comment that embarrassed us, and we feel anger.

Reaction leads to action (*chetanaham bhikkawe kammam wadami*). When we have an emotional response with out insight then we cannot control our emotions. When anger arises, heart rate increases, muscles tense and breathing becomes quick and shallow. By reacting you feed what your body dictates. Perhaps after yelling at someone, the anger will dissipate. Releasing this tension can trigger a pleasure sensation, which is gratifying and creates what psychiatrists call positive reinforcement. This means that we will have a strong inclination to repeat this pattern. That is the nature of tension. However, the mind and more importantly, perception, is nowhere to be found. Emotion is the physical reaction with no insight to guide us.

Therefore, emotions are not really helpful, even when they are pleasurable, because emotions can blind us. And they can never be fully be satisfied. Emotion changes our body chemistry and manifests in our psyche. A body that is free from the harmful effects of emotions is proven to be healthier. Although it is hard to specify an exact number, a vast majority of doctors and scientists agree that a life of calmness and peacefulness can slow or either stop the onslaught of disease on our bodies. There are many stories about people who recover from cancer and blood related diseases through meditation, by calming the mind.

How can we control our emotions? It is better to stop the process before it manifests in the body or turns into physical action. We have to work with perception. It is not wrong to have sense experiences, but we have to use perception to stop experiences from arousing emotion. That will lead us into happiness without pain. By having the correct perception, we experience each sense as it is. We can see emotions when they arise. It will help us to be joyful all the time. Then we can experience life without being blind, without being controlled by emotion.

Then you can begin to see things as they are, to realize the nature of the world. Emotion will be seen as not a part of us, but as an impermanent state. Then nothing can arise pain in you. It will lead to ultimate happiness.

— *Bhante Sathi* —



One of the toughest things about Buddhism is that it offers no special person, image, incantation, or other unchanging form around which faith can solidify.

Christianity has the image of Jesus. Islam has “There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his messenger.” Hinduism has an endless pantheon of deities to worship, and Judaism offers not just a faith but a whole life in which faith is so well-defined a part that doubt itself is considered a subcategory of faith.

Of course, Buddhism has the Buddha. There are lots of statues of Buddha placed around Buddhist temples and meditation centers. Some Buddhists carry around the Dhammapada just as Christians always carry a Bible, as a touchstone of their faith. And of course there is Buddhism’s “Triple Gem” that offers followers peace by taking refuge in “the Buddha,” “the teachings of the Buddha,” and “people who follow the teachings of the Buddha.”

But if you look closely, none of the Buddhist refuges are truly solid in the same way that the personal figure of Jesus, the Bible, Islam’s five daily prayers, and the faith practices of many other religions are solid, in the sense that they offer the blessings of peace, forgiveness, and freedom in themselves alone.

Take the first refuge of Buddhism, “the Buddha,” for example. What does it really mean to “take refuge in the Buddha?” It’s not an easy question, at first, to answer. One doesn’t petition or pray to the Buddha in the sense of asking him personally for insight, favor, or forgiveness. Nor does one thank him for providing our daily bread, our shelter, and for creating this wondrous universe we live in.

So what are we doing when we “take refuge in the Buddha?” Mark Nunberg, the spiritual teacher of the Common Ground Meditation Center in Minneapolis, gave a dharma talk on this subject at a recent retreat in Zumbro Falls, Minnesota.

He reminded us that the word Buddha means “the one who knows.” Knows what? Knows the way things are. In other words, an intelligence that is unswayed by the chattering mind, by the storytelling mind, by the mind that hopes, fears, and is forever strategizing to make life better or different than it is, right now.

So what does it mean to “take refuge” in such an intelligence? And in whom, or where specifically, does that intelligence reside? And when do we know that we have successfully reached this place and found true and lasting refuge there?

Mark quoted the Buddhist monk, the Venerable Ajahn Sumedho, who said in answer to these questions: “When we take refuge in the Buddha it doesn’t mean that we take refuge in some historical prophet but in that which is wise in the universe, in our minds, that which is not separate from us but is more real than anything we can conceive with the mind or experience through the senses.”

When I heard these words, I recalled a story told by a monk who studied as a novice under the revered Thai forest monk, Ajahn Chah. As a novice the young man had noticed the saintly Ajahn Chah sneaking a smoke behind his meditation hut one day. The novice kept the discovery to himself until one day he blurted out his disappointment to the older monk. Ajahn Chah smiled and said, “Thank you for pointing this out, I will do what I can about it. In the meantime, I am surprised you think you could ever find the Buddha anywhere but inside yourself.”

Not having a solid form, face, or person in which to place our trust and faith – like a statue of the Buddha, or the saintly figure of the then-living Ajahn Chah – is at first a frustrating part of Buddhism. But in the end it’s the best part, because when you’ve finally find that wisdom you’ve found it within yourself.

## —A Moment With A Buddhist Nun —

*Ani Pema is a Buddhist Nun from Tibet, who now resides in Chanhassen, MN. She has been living in the US for several years, where she has participated in a number of Bhante's retreats and meditation sessions. I had the pleasure to sit down with Pema recently for the opportunity to interview her for the "Insight".*

**Q: Where are you from?**

**Ani Pema:** I am from Tibet, but born in Darjeeling, India

**Q: What was it like to experience the culture in the U.S. for the first time? How did that affect you?**

**Ani Pema:** It was kind of strange. We find a lot of difference in culture like eating habits and the way you present yourself. For example, when I was living in North Dakota with the Benedictine community, they gave us the opportunity to take courses at the universities in the host monasteries. The classes were very informal. Usually in our culture we have a lot of respect for the teacher and when we have something to ask we stand up, but I found that here the teachers come to you and you can put your feet up, you can drink your pop and things like that. That was very strange to see because I am not used to that. We are very respectful to our teachers and our elders.

As I stay longer I see that here in the West, in general they put a lot of value in youth and beauty and the older generation are not well cared for. That is what I sense. In our culture we really have a lot of value and respect for older people. For example, I recently offered help to a few elderly people and they said, "Oh! I am fine! I can do it!" In our culture when we don't reach out to help the old people, it is disrespectful. If a younger person will go and offer help to an elder, the elder will be very happy. They will appreciate it. In our culture, if we have elderly people at home, we feel the energy is good in the house. We always like the companionship of the old people.

Anyway, I have liked the US since my childhood. I always wanted to come to US., Americans have always been kind and supportive. As far as I know and understand, America has always been there to help others in need. Tibetan refugees have always received aid from Switzerland and America. Also, many Americans have sponsored us individually in the monasteries.

**Q: How do you support yourself.?**

**Ani Pema:** I came on my own. My sisters and brothers paid for my airfare and expenses to come and settle in the US. . When I arrived, my Tibetan friends introduced me to Dr. Yael Rubin who invited me to stay in her house. That is how I came to stay here and get shelter and food. We are like family. Before arriving I was not sure how I was to get by, but my intuition took me to where I needed to be. I have many friends here. I never expected that I would be giving talks and lectures, but I am happy to share what I know with others, which is what my Masters taught me. I am happy. It is beneficial for others. If others are interested to listen to what I have to share, I am always happy to share.

**Q: What do you think is the most rewarding part of being a nun?**

**Ani Pema:** I got more opportunities to practice these profound Buddhist teachings. I feel really fortunate to have such great Masters who teach these beautiful, wonderful teachings that open our minds. It is such a beautiful thing to be a nun and to practice. How profound and how precious are the teachings and how precious is the time that we are practicing the teachings! His Holiness the Dalai Lama says we can practice in the monastery, in the house, anywhere. It entirely depends on the individual. But being in the nunnery, we get more opportunities. It is a community based around the teachings of the Master.

**Q: What advice do you have for Americans?**

**Ani Pema:** Reach out to your neighbors. His Holiness the Dalai Lama always encourages us to bond with others. We are all better people when we are involved with one another, and helping each other out.

**Q: In the nunnery, how did they teach compassion?**

**Ani Pema:** Compassion means concern for others suffering.. Genuine compassion is a concern for the suffering of others, concern for their troubles, concern for their afflicted emotions.

If you have trouble feeling compassion for someone, then practice tolerance and look at the problem. What is the cause? Where does it come from? Then analyze it from many different angles. Once, I had a conflict with a young girl. She would say hurtful insults, but I tried to remain positive and unaffected, but it was too much. Then I saw how we can really develop Bodhichitta. Maybe the other person cannot tolerate me because of jealousy. No matter what I think of myself, the other person still sees me as her enemy. Keeping that in mind, we can develop Bodhichitta or compassion.

**Q: What do you think of the situation in Tibet right now?**

**Ani Pema:** From the news I hear from others, the Chinese are just putting a mask in front of the tourists. They are trying to show that the Tibetans are very happy under their control with improved government services and schools. I don't believe any of that because I heard that in places where tourists are, they "dress up" the Tibetans and brainwash the youth into thinking that they have religious freedom. I think they are under the watchful eyes of the Chinese wherever they go. The tourist guides are supposed to say nice things but they are careful of what they say because of government spies. But I think there are a lot of people suffering in prison, being tortured, especially in remote areas. They miss His Holiness the Dalai Lama, but they are not allowed to keep his photo, they are not allowed to keep the original photo of His Holiness Panchen Lama, and of course the Chinese communists have put their own candidate as Panchen Lama in the Panchen Lama's monastery in Dashingpo.

**—Interviewed by Melissa Lorentz -**



**Question: How can I overcome sleepiness?**

**Answer:** Buddhist teaching explains the five hindrances (*Neevarana*), which are obstacles to the mind

- 1) Sensuous desire (*kamachchanda*)
- 2) Ill-will (*Viyapada*)
- 3) Sloth and torpor (*Thina-Midda*)
- 4) Restlessness and Scruples (*Uddhacca-kukkucca*)
- 5) Skeptical doubt (*Vichikichcha*)

**Q: I meditate everyday. Some days my sessions are strong and other days my mind is constantly wandering, or I begin to feel groggy. Why are there inconsistencies?**

**Answer:** *This is a common problem so lets break this down. When we have a strong and productive meditation session we are happy and so when we sit again the next time, we crave for the same experience. Unfortunately, we don't always get the same result. We often have weaker moments with sleepiness and a lack of focus. What we must remember is that we should not strive for any particular goal during meditation, but to simply be present in the moment. If your mind wanders, then gently bring your mind back to the present moment and continue. Accept all moments as they arise in your mind even the distracting ones and allow them to pass.*

*Sitting meditation is not a pleasure seeking experience for the mind or body. Since our mind is conditioned to seek pleasure and stimulation all the time, it creates an imbalance, or feeling of ill will. Sleepiness then sets in which brings feelings of restlessness and agitation. If we are not aware of all that is happening then feelings of skepticism sets in. We come up with excuses such as, "This is not a good time to meditate" or " This is not a good place to meditate" or " I can't meditate." Lord Buddha's advice to all meditators is to be aware about this situation and avoid the hindrances.*

*If you are not meditating on a consistent basis then that can also contribute. An Olympic gymnast becomes one through everyday practice till it becomes second nature. Meditation is the same. The stronger our dedication to practicing, the stronger we become over time.*

*To combat sleepiness try rubbing your hands together, or pinching your ear. If that doesn't work, slowly stand up and practice in a standing position. Try walking meditation for a while before you return to the sitting position.*

### Vachchagotta Sutra



Then Vacchagotta the wanderer went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, exchanged courteous greetings with him. After an exchange of friendly greetings & courtesies, he sat to one side. As he was sitting there, he said to the Blessed One, "Now then, Master Gotama, is the cosmos eternal?"

"That has not been declared by me, Vaccha: 'The cosmos is eternal.'"

"Well then, Master Gotama, is the cosmos not eternal?"

"Vaccha, that too has not been declared by me: 'The cosmos is not eternal.'"

"Then is the cosmos finite?"... "Is the cosmos infinite?"... "Is the body the same as the soul?"... "Is the body one thing, and the soul another?"... "Does the Tathagata exist after death?"... "Does the Tathagata not exist after death?"... "Does the Tathagata both exist and not exist after death?"... "Does the Tathagata neither exist nor not exist after death?"

"Vaccha, that too has not been declared by me: 'The Tathagata neither exists nor does not exist after death.'"

"Now, Master Gotama, what is the cause, what is the reason why — when wanderers of other sects are asked in this way, they answer that 'The cosmos is eternal' or 'The cosmos is not eternal' or 'The cosmos is finite' or 'The cosmos is infinite' or 'The body is the same as the soul' or 'The body is one thing and the soul another' or 'The Tathagata exists after death' or 'The Tathagata does not exist after death' or 'The Tathagata both exists and does not exist after death' or 'The Tathagata neither exists nor does not exist after death,' yet when Master Gotama is asked in this way, he does not answer that 'The cosmos is eternal' or 'The cosmos is not eternal' or 'The cosmos is finite' or 'The cosmos is infinite' or 'The body is the same as the soul' or 'The body is one thing and the soul another' or 'The Tathagata exists after death' or 'The Tathagata does not exist after death' or 'The Tathagata both exists and does not exist after death' or 'The Tathagata neither exists nor does not exist after death'?"

"Vaccha, the members of other sects assume form to be the self, or the self as possessing form, or form as in the self, or the self as in form.

"They assume feeling, perception and fabrications to be the self..."

"They assume consciousness to be the self, or the self as possessing consciousness, or consciousness as in the self, or the self as in consciousness. That is why, when asked in this way, they answer that 'The cosmos is eternal'... or that 'The Tathagata neither exists nor does not exist after death.'

"But the Tathagata, worthy and rightly self-awakened, does not assume form to be the self, or the self as possessing form, or form as in the self, or the self as in form.

"He does not assume feeling, perception, and fabrications to be the self..."

"He does not assume consciousness to be the self, or the self as possessing consciousness, or consciousness as in the self, or the self as in consciousness. That is why, when asked in this way, he does not answer that 'The cosmos is eternal'... or that 'The Tathagata neither exists nor does not exist after death.'"

— Middle length 73 —

Thus gone one. A term the Buddha used about himself as an individual who has brought an end to suffering and has reached *nibbana*.- editor

( From page 1.....)

Another important aspect of this technique is that it helps us to experience the present moment even for a few minutes. Because breathing is always taking place, it is always happening, if we are mindful or conscious of breathing even for a few minutes, you can experience what it is to be here, what it is to be present. Otherwise, most of the time we are lost with either the past or the future and we even don't know whether we are in the past or the future. So there can be lot of confusion, lot of disorder in our minds but this technique, just by being in the present, it helps us to experience the present moment.

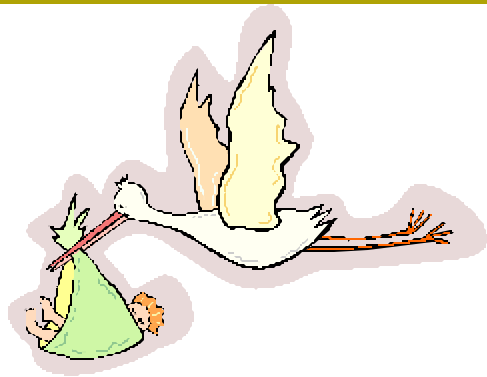
Another important point to remember is that we need to make a connection with our breath and the way we can make a connection with our breath is to see our breath as our friend. One thing is that he or she is the only friend who is with us all the time. Also, even when we are sleeping, our friend is active. Do you have any friends who will be with you when you are sleeping?

Another reason why he or she is our best friend is, as I said earlier, it is always helping us to experience the present moment. And the moment you experience the present moment, those moments are moments of freedom. Related to that is that our friend, the breath, whenever we are having an emotion, if you at that moment think of your friend, please try that, there is an immediate recovery from that emotion and then you can experience some space because you come back to the present moment. A friend of mine asked me yesterday that when he is at the traffic lights, he becomes impatient. I think we can all relate to this situation, especially when we are late for an appointment and you see only the red light. You can be angry at the red light, which creates suffering. I told my friend, the next time he finds himself in such a situation, just relax; spend some time with your breath. So earlier you hated the red light, now you can feel grateful for the red light because thanks to the red light, you can be with your friend, the breath. Whenever you are having any unpleasant emotions, stress, anger, fear, anxiety, guilt, any unpleasant emotion that create our suffering, spend sometime with the in-breath and the out-breath. What happens to that emotion? I will tell you a simple reason why we can find relief in such a situation. When we are having an emotion, what makes it bigger or worse are our thoughts. So that in such a situation, if you can spend a few minutes with our friend, there is no room for thoughts to arise and there is an immediate recovery.

When we are with the breath, we can experience some calm, space, and stillness in our mind. Buddhists call this Samadhi, which is calm, tranquility, and stillness. It is interesting that this technique has the aspect of experiencing Samadhi as it helps us to experience some insight, some wisdom. As I said, it helps us to see thoughts as just thoughts, just to mirror our thoughts, just experiencing the sensations, just experiencing sounds, so we can have this very important Buddhist insight: learning to see things just as they are.

Does breathing mindfully help us in everyday life or only when we are sitting on a cushion? I would suggest that as I said, whilst sitting, we have this insight, we develop the skills, we develop awareness, we develop a non-reactive equanimous mind and then, what is more important, is to have such a mind in everyday life. What I try to do in my talk is to present some points, some aspects about the importance of this technique of being aware of our breathing.

He was a fountain of water that will never dry up, an eternal light that shows the path to wisdom. Even after his death he continues to guide us through this path of wisdom towards enlightenment with great compassion. Mr. Godwin Samarathna was a well known Buddhist meditation teacher in Sri Lanka. He lived most of his life in the Nilambe Meditation Center, Galaha, Sri Lanka. He traveled all around the world teaching and guiding people of every background in Buddhist meditation.



## Voice Of Wisdom

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### Is That So?

The Zen master Hakuin was praised by his neighbors as one living a pure life.

A beautiful Japanese girl whose parents owned a food store lived near him. Suddenly, without any warning, her parents discovered she was with child.

This made her parents very angry. She would not confess who the man was, but after much harassment at last named Hakuin.

In great anger the parents went to the master. "Is that so?" was all he would say.

After the child was born it was brought to Hakuin. By this time he had lost his reputation, which did not trouble him, but he took very good care of the child. He obtained milk from his neighbors and everything else the little one needed.

A year later the girl-mother could stand it no longer. She told her parents the truth - that the real father of the child was a young man who worked in the fish market.

The mother and father of the girl at once went to Hakuin to ask his forgiveness, to apologize at length, and to get the child back again.

Hakuin was willing. In yielding the child, all he said was: "Is that so?"

### 2550th "Vesak" Celebration

ceremony of commemorate Lord Buddha's Birth, enlightenment and death.

**When :** April 29

**Where:** Gustavus College; St Peter, MN

#### Schedule

9.00 am to 11 .30 am Retreat

11.30 am to 12.30 PM Offering and Practice

Offering to Buddhist Monk , Lunch and Gift

( Sri Lanken, Tibetan, Vietnam, and Zen Monks and Nuns will be attend )

12.30 Movie ( Life of the Buddha )

2.00 Talk From -Doug McGill

2.45 Zen Chanting from Zen Monks

3.05 Blessing from Tibetan Monks and Nun's

3.30 Blessing & Chanting from Sri Lankan and Cambodian monks

4.00 Light festival from All Buddhist traditions

5.30 End

### All Are Welcome

There are various ways that you can help and joint this ceremony,

**Triple Gem of the North** Is a 501 (C) 3 approved tax-deductible Non-profit organization based in state of Minnesota. We operate in Minneapolis, St Paul, Chanhassen , St Peter and Mankato. Your tax-deductible contribution will assist in our endeavor to serve the community through weekly meditation classes, day long retreats and the assistance in building a permanent retreat center. Triple Gem is also heavily involved in various disaster relief efforts such as Tsunami relief in Sri Lanka, and Hurricane Katrina. This is done in the spirit of the teachings of the Buddha.