

February 2006

Issue No: 8

Insight

Voice Of Wisdom

Monthly News letter of The Triple Gem Of The North

Weekly Meditation

Monday Evening
6.30 PM to 8.00 PM

Unitarian Universality Fellowship

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

Heartwood Mindfulness Center

3706 E 34th St,

Minneapolis

Call Ray@ 612-760-3996

Saturday Morning

10.00 AM to 12.00 PM

Chanhassen Library

7711 Kerber Drive

Chanhassen, MN

Call Ralph@ 952-934-9727

All are Welcome



Lasting Ripples

Last February at this time I had the incredible privilege of joining Bhante Sathi and several other volunteers in going to Sri Lanka following the tsunami. Our team traveled to Sri Lanka to work with children and families, unable to be really prepared for what the experience would present. Seeing the country through the eyes of Bhante Sathi, and meeting hundreds of people so affected, changed all of us on so many levels, in such profound ways.

Since returning home we have continued to explore ways in which we each can serve, and currently, are beginning efforts to help connect willing sponsors to children in Sri Lanka. Bhante Sathi has recently traveled to Sri Lanka again, and has established a connection for sponsoring school children.

We will be helping to coordinate efforts to seek willing sponsors. Twenty dollars a month will go directly toward assuring that the basic needs of food, shelter and clothing can be met. So many children lost parents in the devastating waves over a year ago. And while many children are being cared for in their community by extended family, the cost of caring for these children can be a significant strain amidst a struggling economy of rebuilding.

We are continuing to find ways to help those affected by the tsunami in the same spirit of what we learned in the graciousness of the Sri Lankan people--when you do what is in your heart and good for others, more goodness will come. I see this tenfold as I track the progress being made in rebuilding and as I continue to hear the stories from our team of where the tsunami waves took each of us.

— Courtney Towne —

(Go to page 5 and learn how you can help them)

When Compassion Goes Out of Fashion

Recently, I was traveling to California, and grabbed a copy of Newsweek to read on the plane. Inside is a weekly column devoted to the everyday person to write entitled “My Turn.” A woman named Olga Polites wrote the January 23rd column. She chronicled her loss of her husband’s college aged cousin, Constantine, who was brutally murdered by a next door neighbor and her reaction over time to her struggle to resolve her internal conflict between intellectually disagreeing with the death penalty, and her emotional reaction to see Constantine’s murderers die for their crimes.

The horrible event hardened her heart. She talked about being indifferent to the murder’s plight when his family wept over their difficulties from escaping a brutal life from their Vietnamese homeland, and how difficult it was to adjust to life in the US.

The real story though is in the accompanying photograph with the article. The portrait is in a darkened room with the drapes closed three quarters giving a feel of gloom like the environment is a reflection of her inside emotion. The image is framed by darkness with a spotlight on her face, scowling, her arms crossed in a defensive, emotionally roped off position. I found that hard to look at. Is this the face of a hardened heart?

Honestly, I do not know if I could handle such a situation any better. It is easy to intellectually accept an anti death penalty position, but not so easy when it happens to someone you love. I can play the role of being the compassionate one; just don’t ask me to make it a documentary.

To be angry, or worse, hateful, is easy to accomplish. This does not take much effort. The photograph showed me what it looks like. If hatred, anger and revenge is easy to accomplish and compassion is not under these circumstances, then perhaps they are muscles that don’t get enough exercise. As children, we were taught to earn our grades, to not cut corners or take the easy way out. Is not working on compassion breaking the same rule? Is hatred and revenge the easy way out?

If I were in this woman’s position, perhaps I would shift my focus from the plight of the murderer’s hardship to the plight of his innocent family, who are also victims. All mothers feel their child in the womb, and continue to feel their pain after birth. Parent and child connection is felt directly for nine months, then indirectly throughout life. To know that they suffer as I would could forge a path of compassion that would begin to soften the heart. For someone like Olga, or us, the first person to be compassionate with is ourselves. We have to loosen our fist before we can extend a handshake. If we hold onto the thought that we are the only one who suffers, and not the other person, then our anger only gets stronger, not weaker. We cannot stop suffering until we realize this.

In our practice it is good to focus on the most difficult relationships in our lives both at home and at work. Why do we dislike the other person, and why do we avoid them? If we took the time to understand their point of view, then we could live with this person not as an adversary, but as a friend. This will help us to let go of our suffering and to turn compassion from an intellectual exercise to a true part of our lives.

— Richard Price —

The Faith to Try Again

Is there faith in the practice of Buddhism?

If Buddha is not a God who promises deliverance from human suffering, how can we have faith in him, or even have interest in him? And how can we have either interest or faith in the practice that bears his name?

These questions often arise in our sangha, especially from people brought up in other faith traditions such as Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. They are used to having faith in a God who goes by the names of Jesus, God, or Allah.

One member of our sangha wrote an e-mail recently saying "I wonder if there isn't some sort of faith at bottom of what we do, faith that there is something meaningful, something larger. Moving forward in the face of the unknown is a kind of faith."

I agree. What attracts me to the Buddha's teachings is not that he is a God who promises deliverance from suffering, but a man who does so. When I visualize the Buddha, I usually think he would look outwardly very normal, robust but quiet, even unexceptional. It's only when he'd start to talk that I would sense something extraordinary. In the Buddhist tradition it's said that when the Buddha was near death his closest disciple, Ananda, expressed sorrow that he would soon pass away. The Buddha consoled him by saying that all physical things pass away, that "the teaching is the true refuge," and that for all time anyone who engages with his teachings would encounter the true Buddha.

"Come and see" was the Buddha's constant refrain. In other words, people should try meditation for themselves. If you discover something, try it a little more. But never believe anything blindly no matter how high an authority says so. Each person works out her own enlightenment, the Buddha says. Our life's journey is to "become a lamp unto oneself."

Faith to me is the leap we take when, having found something real in the practice, we try again. The risk-reward ratio is very much in our favor. If we sit for an hour and notice nothing, what have we lost? Only an hour. But what might we gain? Freedom from suffering, and the chance that we may, by our example, help others work free from suffering as well.

Faith comes into play for me especially at times of backsliding. There are times when I feel my hours of meditation are paying off. I have a spacious mind-body, decisions come quickly and naturally and all things, including happiness and sadness, are firmly part of a greater flow. And then comes a night of longing or self-pity and though I know that mindfulness is the cure, I hang onto all my precious extremes. They feel like "me," and I hoard them like candies.

In the midst of my gorging on sweet extremes, when I finally do meditate, I do it purely out of faith.

"Show me," I say to the teachings, defiantly at this point.

And then somehow even after a minute, I notice that things are settling down. My sorrows, longings, and anger are dissolving like sugar cubes in hot tea. The tea is mindfulness itself, and it is always there.

At least, it has always been there so far. My experience with meditation has been good enough to this point, that I have faith to try again.

— Doug McGill —



Q Tony from MI: Is the feeling of emotion a sixth sense beyond the five we already are aware of in our body? For example, sometimes I will experience joy when thinking about the admirable nature of Sangha and the benefits I receive from it. Other times they are feelings without specific origin other than acknowledging that negative feelings occur with negative occurrences, and positive feelings occur with positive experiences. Which sense does my body register this experience?

A Bhante : Our five senses are sight, touch, smell, hear and taste. To sense a feeling that is not tied to a bodily organ is referred to as 'Mano.' The connection with the brain is how we detect what we feel. For this sixth sense, there is no visible organ, despite the clear connection from feelings beyond the five senses. Buddha explained this as the sixth faculty. This is the intellect the faculty. It is clear that what ever you detect depends on your intellect faculty. For example, you might be able to read a page in a book without eyeglasses, others cannot. That means their eye faculty is different from you. While we do not have an instrument to measure faculty of intellect, mindful awareness are powers of this faculty. You see this in the Sangha, as have others who have developed inner peace and mindfulness have also developed the faculty of intellect, which is beyond the five senses. I hope this is helpful.

Q Marveda : If we practice loving-kindness towards all living beings, are plants and bacteria included in that? Are we supposed to minimize any harm we might cause to all living organisms or just animals?

A Bhante : First, it is better to understand the boundaries of living and non- living. Animals, trees are considered to be living things and rocks, sand, water, fire are considered as non-living things. What is the basic difference between living and non- living things?

Living things have a functional cell that is subject to re-produce. But non-living things doesn't have this ability.

Let see the groups of living things. We know about the mind and the thoughts it produces. We know that we have only one mind, but we have millions of living cells in our body. Each living cell doesn't have its own mind. Because of that Buddha explains that living beings have a mind, while non living things do not. Our mind makes this difference as it associates with the five aggregates (corporeality {i.e. of the body}, feelings, perception, mental formations and consciousness) which creates one self. In the Buddhist point of view beings are that who ever exit in a form that associated with these five aggregates.

We develop loving-kindness towards these living beings. But at the same time co-exist with other living things such as trees and cellular organisms that doesn't have a mind that associates with these five aggregates. These living things without a mind sometimes can be harmful to humans and other living beings. In order to survive and to be healthy we have to fight against them. This doesn't mean that we shouldn't develop loving kindness towards them. Loving kindness should also be connected with wisdom. That is very important. There is no loving kindness with out wisdom.

Q Marveda; When I have heard about rebirth, it is usually implied that rebirth as an animal is considered a "lower" rebirth. Why is it considered a bad thing to be reborn as an animal? Are human beings seen as "higher" than other animals?

A Bhante : Power is one of the most important things in the world. The rule of the forest is that the stronger animal kills the weaker one for food. This is called the food chain. But some animals and humans use their intellect and ingenuity to survive, to find food, to find ways for protection and to live in this world. Today human beings are more powerful than other animals considering the development of technology. We almost control our environment, at least like to think we do. We could say it is better to be a human than an animal.

Usually animals follow habits and instincts. But they can't develop their mind by themselves. Human on

the other hand can develop them selves and can correct their habits if they are wrong. Also, they can develop by themselves. That is why humans are considered a higher form of being.

For example, animals have been building their homes the same way for thousands of years but humans has changed by moving out of the caves to build new structures as houses using new technology.

In Buddhist point of view what makes this difference is the level of Karma (good or bad deeds). Karma makes the difference and cause this difference with birth. Beings that are born as humans have a higher degree of collected good deeds than animals. In Buddhist teaching there are 11 realms where beings can exist. They are the human realm, six other higher realms and four lower realms. Animal world is one of the lower realms.

In the Spirit of Noble Friends, Triple Gem of the North invites you to submit your questions to Us at info@triplegem.org

(From 1st page.....)

Food, shelter and clothing are basic needs for every human being. Many children who have lost one or both parents in the tsunami now have no way to have these basic needs met. This loss of life and resulting loss of livelihood have put these children in jeopardy. Adequate food, medical care, school books and supplies are ongoing needs. For a donation of just \$240.00 these needs can be completely met for one child for an entire year. A \$120 donation will cover these needs for six months. Every penny of your donation will be used only for this purpose.

To contribute, just send us your name, address, phone number, and e-mail along with your tax deductible donation to:

Triple Gem of the North

P.O. Box 323

St. Peter, MN 56082

Upon receipt of your donation an email will be sent to you, along with the child's picture, age, school grade, and guardian's name and address. You will also be sent important guidelines regarding communication with the child you are supporting.

Can you help a child?

2550 years ago, the Buddha spoke the words that you are about to read. It is from the Tipitaka which is a canon of spoken verses from the Buddha for all to learn. After he passed away, 500 enlightened monks gathered to memorize his every word and to pass it on from generation to generation. 580 years after the Buddha's passing, that generation of monks decided to put it in writing as the invention of paper arrived. (about 92 BC) There are three divisions to the Tipitaka, this quote is from the Sutta Pitaka which contains the central teachings of the Buddha to his immediate disciples. We hope you enjoy this and welcome your questions.

— editor —



An Analysis of the Properties

I have heard that on one occasion, as the Blessed One was wandering among the Magadhans, he entered Rajagaha, went to the potter Bhaggava, and on arrival said to him, "If it is no inconvenience for you, Bhaggava, I will stay for one night in your shed."

"It's no inconvenience for me, lord, but there is a wanderer who has already taken up residence there. If he gives his permission, you may stay there as you like."

Now at that time a clansman named Pukkusati had left home and gone forth into homelessness through faith, out of dedication to the Blessed One. He was the one who had already taken up residence in the potter's shed. So the Blessed One approached Ven. Pukkusati and said to him, "If it is no inconvenience for you, monk, I will stay one night in the shed."

"The shed is roomy, my friend. Stay as you like."

So the Blessed One, entering the potter's shed and, setting out a spread of grass to one side, sat down folding his legs crosswise, holding his body erect, and setting mindfulness to the fore. He spent most of the night sitting [in meditation]. Ven. Pukkusati also spent most of the night sitting [in meditation]. The thought occurred to the Blessed One, "How inspiring is the way this clansman behaves! What if I were to question him?"

So he said to Ven. Pukkusati, "I will teach you the Dhamma, monk. Listen & pay close attention. I will speak."

The Blessed One said: "A person has six properties, six media of sensory contact, eighteen considerations, & four determinations. He has been stilled where the currents of construing do not flow. And when the currents of construing do not flow, he is said to be a sage at peace. One should not be negligent of discernment, should guard the truth, be devoted to relinquishment, and train only for calm. This is the summary of the analysis of the six properties.

"'A person has six properties.' Thus was it said. In reference to what was it said? These are the six properties: the earth property, the liquid property, the fire property, the wind property, the space property, the consciousness property. 'A person has six properties.' Thus was it said, and in reference to this was it said.

"And what is the earth property? The earth property can be either internal or external. What is the internal earth property? Anything internal, within oneself, that's hard, solid, & sustained [by craving]: head hairs, body hairs, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, tendons, bones, bone marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, membranes, spleen, lungs, large intestines, small intestines, contents of the stomach, feces, or anything else internal, within oneself, that's hard, solid, and sustained: This is called the internal earth property. Now both the internal earth property & the external earth property are simply earth property. And that should be seen as it actually is present with right discernment: 'This is not mine, this is not me, this is not my self.' When one sees it thus as it actually is present with right discernment, one becomes disenchanted with the earth property and makes the earth property fade from the mind.

— (From Dhatu-vibhanga Sutra) —

Mankato Meditation Center building project

Spread the word! TGN is building the foundation for a Meditation Center in Mankato!

As you know, TGN gets involved in community and charitable activities of all sorts. Supported entirely by our community, Bhante Sathi has helped so many people. From the Sri Lanka housing project, to providing support for Hurricane Katrina victims, friends of TGN have reached out generously with helping hands whenever the need arises.

Closer to home, the TGN community keeps growing in leaps and bounds. In Mankato alone, we have over 70 members on our mailing list, and more new faces sign up every day. Always on the move, Bhante stays busy, mentoring local students, providing individual guidance services, also leading retreats and weekly meditation groups. With so many things going on around here, we need a home.

To provide for this necessity, we've established a Mankato Meditation Center building project. Our goal is to obtain a residence in the Mankato area, large enough to hold meditation groups. This house will also provide a home for Bhante, and other visiting teachers.

We have a great group of individuals helping us get this project off the ground. This is a big task to take on, however, and if you have skills you'd like to volunteer, we'd love to hear from you. And if you'd like to re-invest in your TGN community, please consider making a donation. As always, donations to Triple Gem are tax-deductible.

We're very excited about this project. In this fresh new year of 2006, we can make it happen with your help.

Direct Your Donation To:
Mankato Meditation Center
PO Box 4236
Mankato, MN 56001
(Payable to TGN)

— Lee Weston —
(Coordinator of fundraising comity)

A Cup of Tea

Nan-in, a Japanese master during the Meiji era (1868-1912), received a university professor who came to inquire about Zen.

Nan-in served tea. He poured his visitor's cup full, and then kept on pouring.

The professor watched the overflow until he no longer could restrain himself. "It is overfull. No more will go in!"

"Like this cup," Nan-in said, "you are full of your own opinions and speculations. How can I show you Zen unless you first empty your cup?"

Meditation Retreat

March 25 th — Chanhassen,MN

Where: Chanhassen Rec Center

2310 Coulter Blvd

Time: 10.00 AM to 2.00 PM

The retreat will consist of a series of 30 minute sitting and walking meditations followed by a brief dharma talk and question and answers . A light snack will be served. All are welcome. This event is free, but tax deductible contributions are appreciated. Please bring a cushion to sit on.

To Register : Call Ralph at **952-934-9727** or

Email rpamperim@msn.com

Core Of Buddhism

Buddhist Classes By Bhante Sathi

February 25th 3.00 PM 4.30 PM — Course 1

February 26th 3.00 PM 4.30 PM — Course 2

Where: Mankato, Blue Earth Library 100 East

Main Street, Mankato, MN

Topics will include the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, the life of Buddha, and Dependent Origination. Tell your friends or anyone who may be interested.

To register: email retreat.info@gmail.com or leave a message for Melissa at **(507) 726-2279**.

Voice Of Wisdom

Triple Gem Of The North

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Phone: 612-227-8188

Fax: 952-314-4863

Web: www.triplegem.org

To add you to our mailing list send your information via E-mail or feel free call us.

Seven Qualities of Good Friends

One Gives what is hard to give

One does what is hard to do

One bears what is hard to bear

One reveals ones own secret

One keeps others' secret

One does not leave the friend

who is in distress.

One does not despise

when the friend is ruined.

— Anguttara Nikaya (1V -30)—

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.