

# Mindful News



*Newsletter of the Mindfulness Community of Puget Sound*

**Spring 2003**

## Living with the Precepts

*By Eileen Kiera*

For generations, people have found the practice of the five precepts useful in living a life that was moral, compassionate and kind. When Buddhism came to the West, many people objected to the word "Precepts". They understood a precept as a rule, or as an authoritarian dictate, which violated the non-dogmatic feel of Buddhism in general. Because of this, Thich Nhat Hanh began referring to precepts as mindfulness trainings. This term was not without precedence. Mindfulness trainings are referenced in the Tibetan and Theravada sutras. It seems as though the terms can be used interchangeably. You may take the precepts, for example, but receive a mindfulness training certificate. There need be no difficulty in terms here. The significance of taking and practicing the precepts has no relationship to what we may choose to call them, but it does relate to the ethical nature these guidelines provide for how we live our lives.

Precepts can be experienced as questions for us as individuals and for ourselves within our communities. At the recent retreat with Sr. Annabel, an evening was devoted to considering the mindfulness trainings and addressing peoples' questions about their meaning. Questions were posed to a panel of practitioners who had been practicing with the precepts for many years. Individuals on the panel answered from what they had learned by being with the precepts from their own experience. A great deal of thoughtfulness and insight was communicated that evening, but I heard no

absolute answers of right and wrong. This isn't to imply a kind of postmodern approach of relativism, nor is this a way to evaluate whether we or the situation is right or wrong. Rather it points to responding uniquely to the ever-changing and impermanent nature of our existence from an ethical structure. The precepts become a moral foundation for us to question our choices, our thoughts and our actions without falling into judgment, or rejection, blame and criticism.

The mindfulness trainings are also a focus for practice. It is important that we recite them in our communities to provide us with a place of focus and a time of reflection. This helps the mindfulness trainings to be alive in our lives. In addition, I have found two other practices useful in enlivening the precepts. First, is to keep a journal with my reflections on the precepts, and to see how my understanding and depth of practice has changed over time. Second, is to live with one particular mindfulness training for a period of time. Sometimes, for me, this has been for a long period of time, maybe even a year or more. During this time I let the precept be a mindfulness bell for me to pay attention to my thoughts and feelings. It becomes like a light to see into my consciousness and actions. It becomes like a mirror to see what arises within and its affect on those around me.

All three of these practices; recitations within community, regularly writing reflections in a journal,





## *Mindful News*

Mindful News is the voice of the Mindfulness Community of Puget Sound, a Sangha that practices Buddhism in the tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh. It is published three times a year. May it be for the benefit of all beings.

Teacher: Eileen Kiera  
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Days of Mindfulness: Victoria Chiudina  
Wednesday night sit & TTS liaison: Ellie Graham  
Center Coordinating Committee: David Tower & Erie Jones

If you have any questions or want further information, please call us at 206-324-5373 or visit our website at [www.mindfulnesspugetsound.org](http://www.mindfulnesspugetsound.org)

Our weekly program, which usually includes two periods of sitting, walking, and a Dharma talk or community dialogue, is every Monday from 6:30 to 8:30 PM at our center at 1910 24<sup>th</sup> Ave. S. We have a Day of Mindfulness on the third Sunday of most months from 10 AM to 5 PM. All are welcome.

We welcome contributions to the newsletter. Please email ideas to [tlutterman@attbi.com](mailto:tlutterman@attbi.com)

*Thank you to Lisa Down for her artwork on pages 1, 6 and 7.*

## Practice Center Renovations are Underway

Steady work by our construction firm and the volunteer demolition and clean up by sangha members has transformed the Practice Center with new electrical wiring, insulation, plumbing, structural support, a repaired foundation, new rear and front entries, a spacious zendo, renovated kitchen and bathroom. Installation of a new furnace and finishing work both inside and outside should be completed over the next few weeks to allow us to resume using the Center by mid June. Total cost will come to about \$90,000.

Special thanks should be given to David Tower from MCPS and Kay Peters from TTS who have kept in nearly daily communication with the construction crew and closely watched the dollar flow. Help with finishing work is greatly appreciated at our Saturday work parties. Call David Tower at 789-3025 or Ellie Graham at 721-0141 for details.

Do not be daunted  
by the enormity of the world's grief.  
Do justly, now.  
Love mercy, now.  
Walk humbly, now.  
You are not obligated to complete the work,  
but neither are you free to abandon it.

-Talmud

# Care to Help

by Teresa Lutterman

Last winter, Scott Mantz, a friend of Duncan Berry, came to visit our sangha and shared his inspiring story of Care to Help.

Care to Help was founded by Scott Mantz and his partner Yen Ngo after a visit to Vietnam in November of 2001. Scott told the story of how they hired a driver named Mr. Hung and how this seemingly chance meeting lead them on to change many lives.

Mr. Hung introduced them to a small village near Da Lat where Scott and Yen became aware of the extreme poverty of these people. The villagers are part of an ethnic minority tribe and receive no assistance from the Vietnamese government. One aspect of their poverty was their lack of access to clean water. This resulted in continuous illness among the villagers. Scott and Yen started asking questions. Here is an excerpt from their flyer telling what they learned:

*"We inquired about how difficult could it be to get clean water in this beautiful spot in the mountains, and were assured that there was clean groundwater, but there was no money available to drill a well.*

*Mr. Hung first guessed that a well could cost as much as \$1,000 US dollars. The realization that a village of 350-400 people were living in such unhealthy conditions for lack of such a small amount of money was sickening to us. And unfortunately, this condition is all too common throughout the region.*

*This affected us deeply and we could not stop thinking about the situation these wonderful people endure. After returning to the States we decided we had to attempt to do something to help these people address their situation.*

*The problem looked very solvable, but someone had to step up and take it on and fund it. We decided that we would build them a well to get them clean water. Over then next five months, with the generous support of friends, we were able to build not one, but two wells for the villagers. Both wells needed to be drilled to a depth of over 300 feet. Mr. Hung proved himself to be not only a wonderful caretaker of the village, but also a careful, detailed project organizer and coordinator.*



*"This kid has a great smile. he is getting clean water for the first time. This was right after the drill rig hit clean water." – Scott Mantz*



*The level of health of the villagers had dramatically increased due to the access to clean water. Seeing the direct impact that one can have in improving the lives of those in need has motivated us to continue these efforts."*

Thus Care to Help, a non-profit organization, was born. They were able to build two wells for \$1,800 each. Their latest project was a well for a leper colony. Due to the complexity of the engineering and construction, the cost on this well was higher—it was very successfully completed for \$2,800. They are planning on helping the leper colony with some paving and drainage projects at a later date.

Please consider making a donation. With gratitude for the wonderful teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh, donations will help reduce the suffering in his homeland.

To donate:

The Care to Help Project  
Westlake Ave. N. #21  
Seattle, WA 98109

CTHProject@aol.com



## My First MCPS Retreat

*photos and article by Jon Prescott*

After sitting with MCPS for 15 months, I finally cleared some business off my plate, negotiated care for the kids and attended the Spring Retreat at Camp Indianola. I'd been participating in Quaker retreats for 20 years, but this was my first experience with five days of Noble Silence. I was not disappointed.

The daily routine brought me home to my true self. Stripped of the thousand things in my environment that trigger old habits, I found it easy to flow through the day without distraction and focus my energy on mindfulness: I felt my steps on the earth and enjoyed my breath as it rose (two steps in), then fell (three steps out); I enjoyed the glorious food prepared by Melanie and the kitchen helpers and made it my practice to bow to her after each meal to thank her for feeding my body and mind while leaving me free from responsibilities; I treasured the Dharma discussions, where we found support for our practice and had the opportunity to listen deeply; I found peace in the Dharma talks, where Sister Annabel wove Dharma threads into vivid tapestries and showed us the beauty of living close to our Buddha nature; I was grateful for the hours of

sitting, where my concentration deepened and my legs ached. It was good to be so near my true self.

As wonderful as I found the daily routine, it was not the highlight. The pinnacle came on the last morning when I received the Five Mindfulness Trainings from Sister Annabel and the Sangha. With the nuns in their yellow sashes and the Order of Interbeing members in their brown robes, the inductees were called forward to the touch the earth and receive the Three Refuges and the Five Mindfulness Trainings. I was deeply moved by the





ceremony and felt the link to our spiritual ancestors as I received the words of the Buddha passed from person to person through more than 100 generations. Knowing that these trainings have helped countless others bring peace, compassion and kindness into the world gave me hope for my life and for our ability to make differences in the lives of those we touch. During the ceremony I saw clearly how circumstances had lead me to this moment like so many grains of sand pushing down in an hourglass until, when Sister Annabel recited “I am determined to speak truthfully, with words that inspire self-confidence, joy, and



hope,” I felt myself forced through the narrowest passage and into a new world of joyful possibilities.

Thank you all for helping make this possible. The support I receive from the Sangha, the efforts of the retreat workers and planners, the teachings of Sister Annabel, Eileen and our practice elders, and the understanding of my family all contributed to a wonderful five-day-long moment.



## Upcoming retreats

### Mindfulness Community of Puget Sound

Fall 2003 Retreat led by Eileen Kiera. Thursday evening, October 30 through Sunday afternoon, November 2 at Camp Indianola.

MCPS spring 2004 Retreat with Eileen Kiera— dates to be determined..

### Mountain Lamp

See page 8 for upcoming events.

### Other Retreat Opportunities

Thich Nhat Hanh September 1-6, Estes Park Center in the Rocky Mountains, Colorado.

Thay Phap from Deer Park Monastery will hold a retreat at Camp Indralaya on Orcas Island, September 18 – 21.

## Member Interview: Sue Perkins

*This is part of an ongoing series to help us get to know each other better.*

*interview done by Jessica Logan*

*How and when did you first become acquainted with the teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh?*

In 1994 I first came across a small book by Thich Nhat Hanh in the library of a Tibetan Buddhist sangha to which I belonged. The teachings seemed very direct and reached me on a deeper level than usual for reading a book.

*What brought you to the Mindfulness Community of Puget Sound and how long have you been practicing here?*

Well, it wasn't Mindfulness Community of Puget Sound yet. In 1994, my teacher was out of the country for a couple months. I was hungry for Dharma and looked for something in the Northwest Dharma News. I went to a Day of Mindfulness with Eileen Kiera, not even knowing that the practice was in the tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh. In those days, the sangha had a day of mindfulness once a month at St. Thomas State Park in Juanita. After lunch we would walk for an hour through the woods, so each month we could see how the vegetation had changed as the season progressed. We stopped going there when we (along with Three Treasures Sangha) bought the Seattle Practice Center in 1996. Buying the Practice Center was the motivation for becoming a formal organization with a Board and a bank account.

I immediately felt at home with the mindfulness tradition. Eileen embodied mindfulness and there was a transmission at a nonverbal level. Something in me just said "yes". I first started going to days of mindfulness and Eileen's retreats, and later to Monday nights as well. Retreats have always been the place for me to deepen my practice, especially longer retreats of one to three weeks. I've been very fortunate to be able to participate in 2 long retreats at Plum Village.

*What is your occupation?*

I am a river geologist (the fancy name for it is *fluvial geomorphologist*). For the last six years, I've had my own consulting business which I run out of my home.

Working for myself gives me the flexibility to go on retreat often, as well as hiking and backpacking in the mountains. In theory, it also gives me the flexibility to work part-time which I have been doing until lately. Now work is picking up again. Often, it's hard to control the timing of projects and I feel anxiety about deadlines and meeting my obligations to clients. I still find it very difficult to be mindful when I feel pressured for time. Being mindful seems easiest when I feel no need to be efficient and productive. That's the joy of being on retreat — then my sole "job" is to be mindful.

*Do you have a spouse and/or children?*

No children, but last summer I got married for the first time. I met John at a mindfulness retreat in Montana. We connected in that openhearted space that retreats generate. At retreats with Eileen and Thich Nhat Hanh I had learned how to open my heart in love, and I think that allowed me to fall deeply in love with John.

*Where did you grow up and what brings you to Seattle?*

I grew up in northern California and lived there until I was 29. I moved to Seattle to go to graduate school in geology, but I already knew and liked Seattle from several trips to the American Festival of Fiddle Tunes in Port Townsend. I've been here ever since.



## A Message from Jip and John

Jip Chitnarong is a sangha sister living with MS. Here is a message from her and her husband John.

*Every day in the morning, Jip's mother provides food to the monks. It's an opportunity to for her to practice generosity. The monks see it an opportunity to practice humility, to realize that they rely on the community to sustain their monkhood. It inspires them to live so as to be worthy to receive.*

*Your generosity has sustained our livelihood, and it inspires us to live in such a way that we are worthy to receive it. Not to mention the inspiration we take from the culinary specialties which have ranged from stir-fries, soups, stews, and salads, to tofu-to-go and Chinese takeout. We are grateful for your generosity and your creativity.*

*Thank you,*

*John and Jip*

Jip holds a meditation, sutra service and discussion in her home Sundays and Thursdays, 7:15 – 8:15.

## On the Paramita of Inclusiveness, Kshanti Paramita

*The Buddha offered this wonderful image. If you take a handful of salt, pour it into a small bowl of water, the water in the bowl will be too salty to drink. But if you pour the same amount of salt into a large river, people will still be able to drink the river's water.... The river doesn't suffer at all because of a handful of salt. If your heart is small, one unjust word or act will make you suffer. But if your heart is large, if you have understanding and compassion, that word or deed will not have the power to make you suffer. You will be able to receive, embrace and transform it in an instant. page 186 "The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching" by Thich Nhat Hanh.*

The sangha has been studying the Six Paramitas on Monday nights.



### *Mindfulness Community of Puget Sound Membership & Subscription Form*

Yes, I would like to participate in the Mindfulness Community of Puget Sound as a:

Regular member: \$25/month (or whatever you can) to support practice center and activities.

(note—Regular Members pay reduced fees for retreats.)

Associate Members: \$10/year to defray cost of newsletter.

Supporting Member: Donation basis. Members who cannot attend regularly but would like to receive newsletter and support the Sangha financially.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: (day) \_\_\_\_\_ (evening) \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail \_\_\_\_\_

Return to MCPS, 1910 24<sup>th</sup> Ave. S, Seattle, WA 98144

*continued from page 1*

and taking up one particular precept as a point of focus, help to us embody the precepts. In this way we bring forth the Buddha's mind in our relationships with people and through compassionate action in the world

*Eileen Kiera will be teaching in Seattle on two Monday evenings, June 2nd and 16th. She will speak on the paramitas of meditation and understanding.*

## 4th of July Sacred Space Gathering at Mountain Lamp

We invite you to join us over the 4th of July week-end to build a sacred circle at Mountain Lamp. Ideas that have been proposed include a labyrinth above the lake, or a circle of stones in the woods, with prayer flags hung from the encircling trees. Other ideas are welcome. If you wish to be part of the design/planning committee, or participate in construction, please let Eileen know at 360-592-5248. We encourage you to come join us for one or several days between July

3rd and 5th. We'll enjoy sitting in the morning, working together, swimming and canoeing and campfires at night. Meals will be communal, with costs limited to covering expenses.

## Mountain Lamp Mindfulness Retreat

Sangha Leadership with Eileen Kiera  
August 13 – 17, 2003

Sangha is the body and activity of the BuddhaMind. Without this body, we are unable to sustain and nourish our practice. We keep the Sangha body alive with our devotion, our mindfulness, and our commitment, and Sangha leadership arises from these. During the retreat, we will exam concrete ways to grow and develop ourselves as leaders within the Sangha body, as well as deepening ourselves through practice.

For more information, and registration form, please contact Danna Zelenka at 360-738-0681.



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1910 24th Ave. S.  
Seattle, WA 98144

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