



Sydney Buddhist Centre

newsletter

Friends of the Western Buddhist Order

Imagination and the Environment

We're taking the theme of this issue from the forthcoming 'Wolf at the Door' events (see inside for more information). Perhaps no better introduction to this theme can be provided than by Sangharakshita's exposition on the 'greater mandala of aesthetic appreciation', an excerpt from his book on the Perfection of Wisdom, 'Wisdom Beyond Words'

The Enlightenment of the Buddha was not a cold, detached knowledge. He saw with warmth; he saw with feeling; what is more, he saw everything as being pure, or *subha*, which also means beautiful. The Buddha saw everything as pure beauty because he saw everything with compassion—just as, conversely, when you hate someone, they appear ugly. When, out of metta [or loving-kindness], you see things as beautiful, you naturally experience joy and delight. And out of that joy and delight flow spontaneity, freedom, creativity, and energy. This flow from metta to joy to freedom and energy is the constant experience of the Bodhisattva. The Bodhisattva's wisdom in the fullest sense therefore includes metta. In a sense, we could even say that metta is *prajna* [or wisdom].

...another word used to describe the Bodhisattva's experience [is] *vidya*. *Vidya* is the opposite of *avidya*, 'ignorance', and is usually translated as 'knowledge'. However, Guenther [a Buddhist scholar and translator] renders it as 'aesthetic appreciation' (like *prajna* but without the element of analysis), which comes much closer to its true meaning. *Vidya* is a sort of relishing of things, a harmony with the world; and its opposite, *avidya*, conveys a sense of alienation and conflict—certainly not an absence of knowledge in the usual sense of the word.

When one is said to *know* something, this carries the suggestion that the knowledge is utilitarian. One knows what the thing is good for; one knows what one can do with it. Sometimes this attitude to things can strike you quite forcibly. One evening, when I was living in Kalimpong, I was out for a walk and saw an enormously tall, beautiful pine tree growing at the side of the road. As I stood admiring it, a Nepali friend came along. 'Just look at this tree!' I exclaimed.



'Isn't it magnificent?' 'Oh yes', he replied, 'There must be at least twenty *maunds* of firewood there—enough for the whole winter!'

If what we see is the utilitarian value of something, we are relating to it from a need, which becomes desire. The tree is seen not as existing in its own right, for its own sake, but as something to fulfil our own need. If, however, we have no desires to be fulfilled, there is no subject and no object. This is the state of the Bodhisattva—empty of any desire to use things for a particular purpose. All that is left is aesthetic appreciation. If you are a Bodhisattva you enjoy the world as much as you enjoy a work of art or an artistic performance—with the difference that you do not experience a division between yourself and something 'out there'. Normally—though less so in the cinema—people in an audience retain a sense of themselves as subjects separate from what they are experiencing as an aesthetic object, and to that degree remain alienated from it. But the Bodhisattva's experience of the world is more like

*music heard so deeply
that it is not heard at all,
but you are the music
while the music lasts*

or like the experience of the woman in the stalls who gets completely carried away and shouts up at Othello 'You silly fool! Can't you see she's innocent?'

The 'purpose' of a Bodhisattva, if one may speak in that way at all, is in no degree passive, however. It is not unlike the function of the artist—except that a painter, say, can rarely just enjoy the world without starting to think of how to make a picture out of it. What the Bodhisattva creates is something different. The Bodhisattva, quite unpurposefully, rearranges the whole

Imagination and the Environment (cont'd)

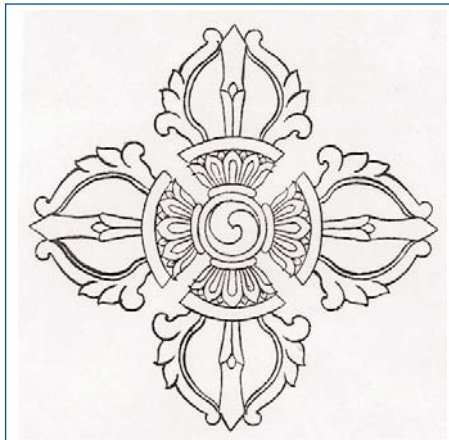
universe and turns it into a gigantic mandala.

What does this mean? Well, what is a mandala? Putting aside the more conventional descriptions, let us take this short definition by a Tibetan teacher, Rongzompa Chokyi Zangpo: 'To make a mandala is to take any prominent aspect of reality and surround it with beauty.' Why you should select one particular aspect of reality over another will be a matter not of attraction as a form of craving, but of spiritual affinity. It will be a facet of reality that you value and appreciate enough to want to surround it with a harmonious pattern of beautiful images. You take, say, a particular Buddha figure—one that you find particularly appealing, sublime, or precious—as the aspect of reality you want to focus on, and you decorate it with, for instance, other Buddha figures at the points of the compass. Then you might place the four elements in between, and use all the other things in nature as materials with which to fill the spaces so as to make a harmonious and pleasing configuration.

The Bodhisattva creates a mandala through a response to the world that is aesthetic and appreciative rather than utilitarian. To sustain life you have to engage in a certain amount of practical activity—you have to think about things and understand how the world works—but if you are a Bodhisattva all this takes place within an overall context of aesthetic appreciation. We usually think of 'aesthetic appreciation' as a little separate part of life within a much larger area that is utilitarian and 'practical', but really it needs to be the other way around. Our overall attitude, our overall response to life, should be purely aesthetic. We should not seek to use things, but just enjoy them, appreciate them, feel for them. We don't have to think of our mandala of aesthetic appreciation as something the size of one of those Tibetan *thangkas* sitting in a corner of the great big real world of important practical business. Instead we can think of ourselves living *within* a 'greater mandala' of aesthetic appreciation, of which all our practical mundane affairs, and the fulfilment of all our (non-neurotic) needs and wants, occupy just a tiny corner. The real values are aesthetic, not utilitarian.

There is a story of a Taoist sage who was sitting by a river with a fishing rod when someone came along and asked him how he could reconcile trying to catch a fish with being a Taoist sage. He replied 'It's all right, I'm not using any bait.'

He was just enjoying the fishing; he didn't need to try and catch anything. We don't *really* have anything to do—well, do we? Most of the time we could just be sitting back, as it were, and enjoying the universe. That's our major occupation. That's our real work—not to work. We need to get food to eat, clothing, a roof over our head, healthcare, a few books, transport of some kind... but the rest of our time and energy we can just devote to contemplation of the universe, simply enjoying it all. This is how the Bodhisattva lives anyway.



I am not talking about some lotus-eating, day-dreaming, navel-gazing ideal here. The Bodhisattva is the greatest worker of all, constantly responding to the objective needs of a situation, but at the

same time he or she operates within the greater mandala of aesthetic appreciation. It is not even as though the sphere within which the Bodhisattva operates is a sphere of 'practical activity' that exists apart from the greater mandala. Bodhisattvas do not absent themselves from the mandala of aesthetic appreciation when they carry on their practical activities. The greater mandala interpenetrates that limited sphere, so that those practical activities are an expression of the values of the greater mandala within a certain context and for the sake of certain people.

The Bodhisattva essentially courses between—and transcends—two unsatisfactory extremes. On the one hand, we can be so immersed in practical activities that we identify with them and consequently become rather harassed and worried, losing sight of the wider horizons of aesthetic appreciation. On the other hand, we can lose ourselves in a spaced-out—if vaguely positive—state of mind in which we are unable to get anything done. The ideal is the middle way. We need to carry on the cycle of practical activities—to which we are not attached, which does not harass us, about which we don't worry—within the wider circle of the greater mandala. Then we can enjoy our work, because it is interpenetrated by this appreciative awareness. This kind of balance is not all easy to achieve. All the time we are likely to be tending towards one or the other of these two extremes, so that we will need to make constant adjustments to keep to a middle way.

As a general rule, we need to alternate between life in the country [taking breaks from the city—to go on retreat, for

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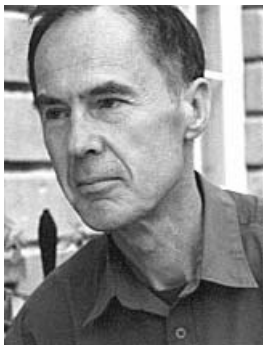
Wolf at the Door

Buddhist-inspired Creative Writing Workshops and Retreats

'Imagination and the Environment'

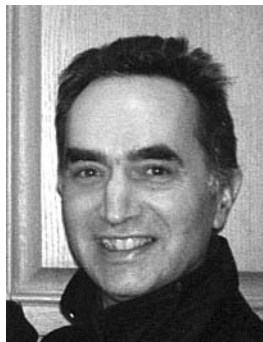
The 'Wolves' are returning to Australia. After their successful visit to this part of the world in autumn 2001 which many of us remember with pleasure, Ananda and Manjusvara, both Order Members from England, are coming back to run more workshops in Australia.

Their workshops have a fresh, spontaneous approach which integrates writing with spiritual practice and helps us to reach inside ourselves to tap our own creativity.



Ananda (Stephen Parr) has been writing fiction and poetry for twenty years and has tutored numerous writing workshops in the United Kingdom and overseas. His poetry has appeared in many publications and has been broadcast on the BBC. His first full-length collection, 'North of the Future', was recently published by Windhorse and is currently available.

Manjusvara (David Keefe) started his career composing music and then moved into the literary sphere. He now edits Weatherlight Press which publishes contemporary American poetry in Britain. Manjusvara's work has also appeared in a variety of publications and he is currently writing a book on writing and the spiritual life.



Imagination and the Environment

The workshops will focus on how we experience our environment, both our immediate everyday environment and the wider natural world that is increasingly threatened by the things we do to it. We can bring our creative imagination to bear on the questions of how to live in harmony with nature; how to actively value the huge diversity of the natural world while acknowledging that we also have needs as part of that world.

How can writing and Buddhism help us to live in a creative balance with the environment? The environment is not only all around us, but inside us too. With our ideas, our habits and our attitudes, we create an internal mental environment

which deeply affects all of us, all the time, in complex ways. 'Inner' and 'outer' inevitably mirror each other: when we experience harmony within, there will naturally be harmony without.



'looking in'

Buddhist Library, 90 Church St, Camperdown

Saturday 6 & Sunday 7 November; 9.30 am – 4 pm

During the weekend at the Buddhist Library, the focus will be more on the internal subjective environment – 'looking in'. We will be thinking about how to value our relationships and connections with others, how to find qualities in the world which we need to develop in ourselves. One way to do this is to imagine ourselves in someone else's shoes - (or paws) -and in so doing, open ourselves to the world as our mentor.

'looking out'

Sydney Buddhist Centre, 24 Enmore Road, Newtown

Saturday 13 – Sunday 14 November; 9.30 am – 4 pm

The workshop at the Sydney Buddhist Centre will focus more on the natural environment, on 'looking out'.

'You don't know what you've got till it's gone.'

How can we change things to save our natural resources? How can we act out of insight and compassion, respect the connections between things, purify the motive for action?

The workshop will encompass these and similar questions in the context of writing exercises, games, discussions and group feedback.

'imagination and the environment' retreat

Vijayaloka Retreat Centre,

7 Howard Road, Minto

Friday 3 to Friday 10 December

For those who would like to spend longer on writing and spiritual practice, the week-long retreat at Vijayaloka with its beautiful bushland setting will provide an ideal situation for tapping into our creative imagination. The trees and rocks and deep waterholes suggest archetypal imagery and ideas of 'sacredness' and ritual. For those who cannot make the full week, it is possible to come for the first weekend.

WOLF AT THE DOOR
BUDDHIST-INSPIRED CREATIVE
WRITING WORKSHOPS & RETREATS.

IMAGINATION AND THE ENVIRONMENT

AUSTRALIAN TOUR
OCTOBER-DECEMBER 2004

Unlock the world's most precious resource:
your imagination

An Interview with Ananda

Sue Johnson asks Ananda to reflect on his last visit to Australia and his sources of inspiration as a writer.

Sue: Did your last visit here—to Sydney and Vijayaloka—leave either of you with any particular feeling for the environment here and if so, what moved you most?

Ananda: I personally was extremely moved by the landscape around Sydney and Vijayaloka, though I saw too little of it. Coming from a tiny country such as England it's difficult to have any idea of the spaces and distances involved in Australia, and the huge diversity of wildlife.



Sue: Vijayaloka is on the edge of bushland. Do you have any thoughts about the Australian bush/environment in comparison to the English/European/USA countryside? For instance, Australia is huge and much of it is desert: there is a feeling of space, of freedom. There is a vast hinterland which lives in the fantasies of people here and has an effect on the work of some of our artists and writers.

Ananda: One of my very first impressions on arriving at Vijayaloka was the parrots swooping around in the trees, their vivid 'in your face' colours and noises. It seemed to jolt me into a greater alertness and appreciation of the energy of so many different creatures living together and sharing the space.

I became aware that Australia is still basically a wild country, with a few civilized bits around the edges. (I don't mean that in an insulting way!). The wildness is so huge and enclosing that you can't ignore it and what it means to us. It is what we've all come out of. It is our bedrock consciousness, our creature-ness, the part of us that is open to interrelatedness and interdependence. In England we've become too estranged from the land on the whole; we can too easily deny that it's there, focus on artifice, entertainment, technology. Australia won't let you do that: the fundamental realities of existence are all too evident.

It is this 'hinterland' which lives in the fantasies of people that fascinates me endlessly: it is one of my major and enduring interests to understand how the environment and the imagination interact and modify each other. I'm sure it's happening all the time on every level, and as a writer I think it's important to take this mutual interaction on board and explore it. One way we do this in *Wolf at The Door* is by just listening and looking at objects until they speak to us, and giving ourselves permission to listen to how they speak; (and of course 'objects' can be entire landscapes). One result of doing this is that you become more silent, more aware of relationship, more capable of empathy. I'm sure this is a fruitful practice that will lead to greater self-knowledge and greater harmony in our relationships.

Sue: When you were at Vijayaloka last, you shared an extract from your novel with us. As someone who likes cats, I remember it featured 'Dr Johnson'. Has the novel been published yet?

Ananda: The novel you mentioned is sadly not yet published, but it IS finished. In fact someone is supposed to

have been reading it for me since last Christmas, but I've heard nothing at all from her (I don't know if this is a good or a bad sign). I have however almost finished a new novel, and I've imported Dr Johnson into it (he's become a kind of essential character in my fiction—I can't imagine writing something now that he isn't in!). He's a kind of silent witness to the human characters, putting them in their true place in the great scheme of things.

Sue: What inspires you to write? Have there been any particular experiences or people that have been significant?

Ananda: The whole world inspires me to write—when I

Currawong

"The things that ignore us in the end save us."

—Andrew Harvey

He won't come closer
though I spoon out mango
flesh and flick it

within a yard of his tangled refuge.
Weightless, like a spaceman, he hangs,
an immaculate sun for an eye,

wheeling somewhere our thing-
heavy minds can't fathom.
He won't sing either.

He keeps his peace,
knowing the world
turns on it.

We wash plates and cups, shake
crumbs to the baked earth,
file to the car.

I feel triumph
that he gave no ground,
that his pristine labyrinth

can't be cracked by hungry algorithms.
The seat burns my fingertips.
I glance back.

He straddles a shimmering heap,
Black
beak reared skyward,

letting the wise juice caress his throat.
Then we're a shrinking drone beyond the eucalypts.
Something is saved.

It's dawn again
in the world.
The song can begin.

—Ananda

An Interview with Ananda (cont'd)

wake up enough to see it. As to specific experiences, its almost impossible for me to pick out 'significant' experiences, because I wouldn't recognize what's significant until long afterwards. I could see someone in a cafe drinking a cup of tea and something about the way they do it might inspire a whole character in a novel; but I couldn't say what that quality was: maybe just a far-away look in their eyes triggered some association off in my mind or memory. Maybe a news item on TV set off a chain of thoughts which led to a story entirely unrelated to the actual triggering event. The imagination is extremely complex and multi-levelled, no one can hope to isolate what its true sources are. I often have ideas that I think are good for a story or part of a novel, but when I start writing them down they change totally into something I never could have imagined without first writing that 'wrong' idea down. And the thing I actually end up with is a far better idea! Where does that come from? What's really going on in that mysterious instant of the pen scratching words on the page? I don't know, and I suspect no writer you could ask would know either! But you have to honour the process and be willing to go where it leads you without asking too many questions.

haiku

Rose petals on the steps
Left by a stranger
We share the same joy

The near-full moon
tangled in black branches
sort of like my heart

Mandaravas drop
from the frangipani tree.
Now only antlers.

—Subhavyuha, Sudristi and Padmalaya



POETRY/WRITING GROUP

How many people would be interested in getting together to share poetry and writing? We could read our own work or present poems and poets that we like as well as other kinds of writing. Meetings could be once a month, or whatever people wanted. If you would like to come to a preliminary discussion, phone Sue Johnson, phone 9603 9603 or email suejohnson@austarmetro.com.au

Drought and Fire

Week after week, the trees blanch,
their leaves gather in dead mounds
and clatter along gutters.

The grass withers—brown as dying fur.
Slowly we learn the metaphysics of drought,
and see the cracked psalm of the earth
that country folk have long since read.

The jacarandas have bloomed early and intense-
like debutantes desperate to be wed.
And hot winds burn the hydrangeas by our door,
that opened expecting summer's prodigality.

When clouds gather, grey and forgetful,
they let fall a memory of rain,
then swirl and evaporate.

From the bus we see other clouds spill upward
round the edges of the city, on the rim of our lives,
like dust from a vast army on the move-
only the smudged crimson and blue
show they are not benign.

We know from the evening news what lies below:
the roaring oven, the shattering columns of flame,
but not being the ones singled
turn back to our newspapers...

I walk home by the empty school in the late afternoon,
where great mobs of leaves collide and scatter.
High coral trees sway and clatter in a dance of distress-
losing their beauty a season too soon.

The air is violet with the aroma of ash
and blue smoke loiters between us and the sun-
which is suddenly soft and wounded—
blurred in a scarlet haze.

The absent rain becomes the touch, the kiss
of a love we yearn to recover; to feel the skin
sing and gasp in downpours we remember.
We wait for night and gentler winds,
for the acid taste to leave our mouths.
Our hopes for rain mingle in the dark like dreams.

—John Keogh (December, 2002)



Keeping the Natural World in Mind

Melanie Hutton reflects on her relationship with the natural world and her engagement with environmental activism as a Dharma practitioner.

I'd like to go by climbing a birch tree,
And climb black branches
Up a snow-white trunk
Toward heaven, till the tree could bear no more,
But dipped its top and set me down again.
That would be good both going and coming back.
One could do worse than be a swinger of birches.

— R o b e r t

Frost

My earliest memory is my mother holding me up to see, touch the silver birch leaves, bark and catkins. This was followed by a childhood rich in experiencing the natural world—the magic of small bulbs becoming huge gladioli spears, the awe of growing an acorn into an oak tree and holidaying in beautiful native forests. This intimate relationship with nature has continued unwaveringly into my adult life—study, work, play, rest.

My spirituality developed as an unspoken, unwritten, non-prescriptive and passionately active engagement with the natural world—the doorway being plants and the woven biosphere we share. So it is little wonder that my life's work is devoted to conserving native forests and challenging socially destructive environmental degradation!

"As we open ourselves to the implications of what we learn, it can be an excruciating experience to watch the planet fall apart piece by piece in the face of persistent and pathological denial." —Ross Gelbspan

When Samavati, the queen-consort of King Udena, offered Ananda 500 garments, Ananda received them with great satisfaction. The King, hearing of it, suspected Ananda of dishonesty and asked what he would do with the garments.

Ananda replied: 'Many of the brothers are in rags, I am going to distribute the garments among them.'

'What will you do with the old garments?'

'We will make bed covers out of them.'

'What will you do with the old bed covers?'

'We will make pillowcases.'

'What will you do with the old pillowcases?'

'We will make floor-covers out of them.'

'What will you do with the old floor-covers?'

'We will make foot-towels out of them.'

'What will you do with the old foot-towels?'

'We will use them for floor mops.'

'What will you do with the old mops?'

'Your highness, we will tear them into pieces, mix them with mud and use the mud to plaster the house walls.'

—from the Dhammapada Atthakatha 1
(commentary to the 'Dhammapada')

Four years ago, after 15 years of sustained, externally-focused environmental activism, I became physically exhausted. The gift of that was it gave me space to explore Buddhism. Through meditation, I have discovered a heart of compassion towards myself and learnt to allow time to reflect and learn before charging back into the fray! So, how has my Buddhism coloured my return to environmental activism?

One key has been to understand my motivation. To look squarely into the depths of the current environmental crisis requires courage, conviction and clarity about what motivates us. I know I want the natural world to live in respected balance with any human induced activity. A tall order given greed, population growth and ignorance. It is a challenge to not just analyse the suffering but to transform the causative destructive behaviour—my own and out beyond me. Quantum physics at its best!

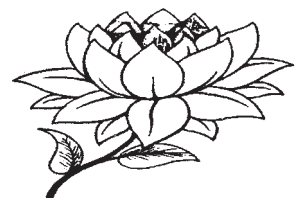
Another key has been connecting in a far deeper, meaningful way to those I work with in the environment movement—eco-sangha

perhaps? I am back being that toddler in awe at what is growing from my Buddhist practice in my life work. Reflected upon and clear responses together with softening my approach has seen rigidly held, destructive behaviour or thoughts meld and morph into positive behavioural change. It has become one of the most energising and satisfying aspects of my work.

Faith—openness and longing to seek higher levels of truth and value rather than any sort of intellectual belief—is a key to turning this environmental crisis around.

Reflecting on the Lotus Retreat

On this retreat we will be reflecting on the qualities of the lotus - qualities such as receptivity, purity and beauty. We will be invited to help to create and dwell in the Pure Land of Amitabha, the beautiful red Buddha of the setting sun, the Buddha of infinite compassion and love. There will be quite a lot of ritual in the shrine room, readings and a short discussion period. If you have any favourite readings which inspire or move you, please bring them with you. The retreat will be led by Padmadakini and Padmalaya. It begins on Friday 12th November and finishes at 4pm on Sunday 14th next. It is suitable for people who have been introduced to the Mindfulness of Breathing and Metta Bhavana practices.



On Becoming a Mitra

During the men's meditation retreat, Ross Pearce had his mitra ceremony. Here he ponders his path leading to this point.

Nothing like a few questions to focus the thinking! So I'm a mitra - enrolled in kindie. Why did I do it? That does make me think back. From quizzically wondering at those strange and sometimes grotesque images in many a foreign temple I have now set upon the same path as those ancient artisan.



Ross during his mitra ceremony

My first real contact with Buddhism was a young monk in Vietnam with whom I spent some great times exploring pagodas in the countryside out of Hue. Then the question was, "How could a vegetarian, non-drinking, celibate

be such a happy man—and a great soccer player?" One day I will give this meditation a shot just to see what it's like. The years roll on and it all becomes a memory.

Then *dukkha* [suffering] strikes. And I'm not talking discomfit. I'm talking deep pain. Worst of all it was all my own doing so I couldn't even blame someone else. A book on Buddhism read in the sweaty heat of Thailand speaks of being happy - positively happy not just bland neutrality. A phone call to the Sydney Buddhist Centre enrolls me in a

meditation course. Gentle Dharmamati leads us through the meditation and responds to my growing interest in Buddhism. The course concludes and I join the Monday night Men's Group.

Why continue on? The meditation seems to work in a subtle but real way. The simplicity of Buddhism rocks my mind - "Know that the world is woven of interconnected threads. This is, because that is. This is not, because that is not." The complexities provide joyful frustration—"Know that the world is woven of interconnected threads. This is, because that is. This is not, because that is not." (No, that's not a typo!) The irritation of only being able to understand from the 'outside-in' rather than the 'inside-out' drives me on. Others become mitras but I hang back. I need more insight. How foolish, to reach a destination you need a path! Gradually I accept that for me, this is the path. I now have total faith that the Buddha is the enlightened one. For the first time in my life I am willing to surrender myself to another's teaching without curling a sceptical lip. The Dharma holds the key. Incomprehension is met with patience rather than dismissal. My ego producer screams at me, the disobedient actor, "You'll never make it without me. You'll be finished." I smile and decide to become a mitra...

I celebrated with the Sangha who for days afterwards say surprising and kind things to me. The true value of the Sangha had become very real on a visit to Sri Lanka where I meet with an FWBO member practicing virtually alone. Very difficult I thought. So now I continue on with the support of the Sangha and especially the Monday night Men's Group where we enjoy the fellowship of meditating, freely discussing the Dharma and just being mates.

It's a long way from where I was a few years ago. I find it exciting turning the strengthening beam of awareness onto my own mind even though at times the revelations can be tough to accept. I suspect the road ahead is long but with the Dharma under my arm and my Sangha friends in support I can but heed the Buddha's final words, "With mindfulness, strive on."

Meditation and Discussion Group for Older Women

Wednesday mornings: 10.30 - 12.30

This group is for women who find it difficult to go to classes in the evening. There is no cut-off age: any woman who feels comfortable coming along to a group designated for 'older' members is welcome to attend. It is not necessary to commit to regular or long-term attendance and both experienced meditators and beginners are welcome. Tuition is available and attendance is by donation.

We begin the group by having a talk about where we are with our meditation practice (if we have one) and/or how we are feeling generally in our lives. This is followed by meditation, 30 - 40 minutes: then a tea break. In the remaining time, we study a topic related to meditation or Buddhism. I like newcomers to contact me before their first session as, for security reasons, we keep the front door locked while we are meeting. Messages for me can be left at the Centre (9519 0440) or at Vijayaloka Retreat Centre (9603 9603) or, immediately prior to the group, I can be contacted on my mobile (0410 122 346). —Sue Johnson, Facilitator



Ross and friends on the men's winter meditation retreat

On Dying, Death and Renewal

Cheryl Hyde writes about the recent retreat for women on Death, Dying and Renewal

On the last weekend in August, fifteen women gathered at Vijayaloka for a Death, Dying and Renewal retreat, run by Karen Alexander and supported by Chittaprabha.

The retreat had a lovely sense of openness and spaciousness within which to reflect on and discuss how death and dying are part of the very nature of life.

There were many moving (and humorous) moments as people recounted their experiences of loved ones dying, and confronted their own fears about death and dying and the inevitability of their own deaths. It was not at all that we should have no fear when contemplating our death, but rather how we deal creatively with that fear.

The emphasis was on unfinished business, and how gratitude and forgiveness can help us to finalise these

issues. On the first day Karen led us through a guided meditation on gratitude. On the second day, she led a further meditation on forgiveness, which I particularly appreciated: firstly, envisaging forgiving someone who has hurt you; secondly, seeking forgiveness from someone you yourself have hurt; and thirdly, forgiving yourself for your own transgressions.



In the shrine room at the end of the second day we concluded the retreat with each woman offering a jewel to the woman on her right, and saying a few special words about that person. The beautiful, positive qualities of each woman were set before us all to hear and appreciate.

By the end of the retreat a light rain had begun to fall, with all its possibilities for renewal. Some took the opportunity to plant some saplings in the rain—here's hoping they grow.

Imagination and the Environment (cont'd)

...continued from page two.

example], where it is easier to establish contact with the greater mandala, and life in the city, where that attitude of appreciation can readily engage with a situation in which are giving of ourselves. Both of these are absolutely necessary for the vast majority of people. Our activity requires the serenity of meditation, while our meditation needs to be vibrant and dynamic, not just a pleasant little relaxation

session. If we the balance right, we go on retreat with our energies aroused and return to the city with the perspective of the greater mandala to apply to whatever we do. The aim—which may take a long time to achieve—is to bring an attitude of pure aesthetic appreciation to whatever circumstances come our way.

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