



Sydney Buddhist Centre

newsletter

Friends of the Western Buddhist Order

The Essence of Enlightenment

Victoria Bel writes of the recent retreat led by Kulaprabha

Kulaprabha led this rich and inspiring retreat with a deft combination of warmth, wisdom, and humour. I particularly appreciated the spaciousness of the retreat. We started each morning with a double meditation period. The mid-morning activity consisted of a period of uppeka bhavana meditation and reflection. The afternoon activity consisted either of a puja or meditation and reflection. The evening activity consisted of readings on conditionality, chanting and walking meditation.

Kulaprabha clarified what is meant by the term 'reflection' i.e. 'turning over in the mind, musing (that is) purposeful and discriminating (not drifting), open to the unexpected thought, connection or feeling, curiosity, adventure, exploration.' Kulaprabha also considered the question of 'why reflect?' and provided tips on how to reflect. I found the idea of 'gentle persistent effort' particularly helpful.

Highlights of the retreat for me were led exercises on the nidana chain in which we were asked to recall a recent experience of craving or aversion and tracing back the causal connection with the feeling and contact that preceded it. To assist us in this exploration, we were given questions to consider such as:

- with the cessation of what could my craving/aversion have ceased?
- with the cessation of what could my craving/aversion have been avoided?
- can I imagine not experiencing that causal chain?

Particularly potent was a reading of the Sutta of the Dart (*Sallatha Sutta*) in which the Buddha describes the difference between 'an untaught worldling' and 'a well-taught noble disciple'. When the former is touched by a painful (bodily) feeling,

'...he worries and grieves, he laments, beats his breast, weeps and is distraught. He thus experiences two kinds of feelings, a bodily and a mental feeling. It is as if a man were pierced by a dart, and following the first piercing, he is hit by a second dart...Having been touched by that painful feeling, he resists and resents it. Then...an underlying tendency of resistance against painful feeling comes to underlie his mind. Under the impact of that painful feeling he then proceeds to enjoy sensual happiness...(because) he does not know of any other escape from painful feelings except the enjoyment of sensual happiness. Then...an underlying tendency to lust for pleasant feelings comes to underlie his mind...When he experiences a pleasant, painful or neutral feeling, he feels...fettered by it....He is fettered by suffering.' The 'well-taught noble disciple' does not react to painful (bodily) feeling and therefore is not hit by the second dart of mental feeling. 'Having been touched by that painful (bodily) feeling, he does not resist and resent it. Hence in him no underlying tendency of resistance against that painful feeling comes to underlie his mind. Under the impact of that painful feeling he does not proceed to enjoy sensual happiness...(because he knows of another form of escape)...Thus...when he experiences a painful, pleasant or neutral feeling, he feels it as one who is not fettered by it....He is not fettered by suffering...'



Invoking the image of Akshobhya and his imperturbability gave a context of faith and equanimity that allowed us to take these reflections on conditionality deeply into our own lives and practice. This was a truly precious gift.

A Breif Personal Account

Janette Gilbert has been very involved with the day-to-day running of the Centre. Kathy Rowe interviews her for the Newsletter

Q. When did you first set foot in the Sydney Buddhist Centre?

A. May 2002 to an intro meditation by Dharmamati

Q. What brought you there?

A. Interest in meditation, a way to deal with a relationship break-up, time to find myself, and Subhavyuha photocopying her course flyers where I was working in Newtown!

Q. You're a mitra...what influenced your decision to become a Mitra?

A. Thirst for more dharma, a feeling of wanting to take my spiritual commitment further and to continue the joy I had found in following the spiritual path with good friends.

Q. What book are you reading?

A. "When God Was a Woman" by Merlin Stone. A friend lent it to me. What's good about it? It challenges the 'Christian history & myths' and presents an alternative perspective of

female deities. I am interested in female spiritual heroes of all religions.

Q. What do you like to do with your time?

A. Anything to do with water-swim, dive, sail. read dharma books, go on retreats!

Q. Now... what DO you do with your time!

A. Work selling Apple computers and lots of ipods! read dharma books, fall behind in my mitra home-work, help out around the Buddhist centre and be mum to my new baby fish!

Q. Are you willing to tell us 2 or 3 ways in which your life has been changed by the Dharma?

A. Extended my bookshelf with lots of dharma books, brought wonderful new friendships into my life and given me an opportunity to volunteer some of my time, rather than just work for money. I know Buddhism has helped me in developing courage and generosity.



Massage at the Centre

Jenny Cornish is a highly trained and experienced masseur. Here's some of what she offers of a Saturday

The human body is in a constant state of flux. Our passage through life leaves its impressions on our physical being. Massage has been used for thousands of years to help ease our way through life. It can help us on many levels to achieve harmony, balance and well being.

As well as being useful for the physical, it is also excellent for those who are feeling stressed or simply in need of some relaxation and time out for themselves.

As a preventative measure regular massage can help to maintain our state of vitality and health. In the event of illness it may help to expedite a return to harmony and wellbeing.

Remedial Massage

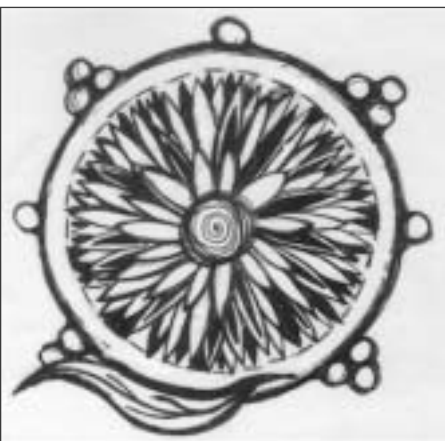
Remedial Massage is used to treat problems in the body. It could be as specific as having a frozen shoulder, or something more general, like having a stiff neck and shoulders. Techniques from other types of massage may also be used, particularly Swedish and Deep Tissue.

Chinese Acupressure

This form of massage works with things such as the Chinese Meridian system, Yin Yang Theory, the elements and the flows of Chi in our body. It seeks to treat the cause as well as the symptom, strengthen the body's resistance, regulate Yin and Yang and restore balance to the flow of Chi and harmony to the body's systems. Traditionally it is done through the clothing, but it can also be successfully combined with other forms of massage.

Energy Balancing

This is most often incorporated into a massage session, but can be done on its own. It is a subtle form of treatment that will involve some on the body work and some off the body work. It is very useful if people are feeling very sensitive, for example and do not want a "regular" massage.



Indian Head Massage

This is performed with the client seated and fully clothed. It works on the upper back, shoulders, neck and face as well as the head. This massage is particularly good for stress, headaches, migraines etc. The treatment concludes by working to balance the three upper Chakras and takes approximately 30 minutes. It combines well with Chinese Acupressure which can then look at related areas.

Jenny Cornish has practiced and taught Tai Chi and Qi Gong in London and Sydney. She is currently an instructor with the Chi Chinese Healing College. Her teaching reflects her belief in the integration that these practices can bring to us.

Jenny has a Diploma of Remedial Massage, a Diploma of Chinese Acupressure, a Diploma of Therapeutic Massage and a Diploma of Indian Head Massage. She has practiced massage in both London and Sydney. In her work, Jenny often combines aspects of the various techniques she has studied believing that muscles and meridians are not mutually exclusive. To book for a massage contact Jenny on 0403 916 778.

Joseph Campbell at the SBC

Over Janet Bremner is hosting a series of lectures by Joseph Campbell. Here she writes about what it all means to her.

"The Truth is but one, the sages speak of it by many names".

Joseph Campbell was fascinated that 'God' assumes such different masks in different cultures. He said the images of God are many, they are the masks of eternity that both cover and reveal what lies behind the visible plain of existence. A myth too is a mask of God, a metaphor for what lies behind the visible world. He said that all the myths and the mystic traditions are in accord in calling us to a deeper awareness of the very act of living itself - to wake up and experience the eternal aspect of the temporal world. What is the mythological experience? Realizing how this moment in your life is actually a moment of eternity, and the experience of the eternal aspect of what you are doing in the temporal experience is the mythological experience.

I was fascinated with the Joseph Campbell videos when I first saw them and in particular what turned out to be, in essence, the Four Noble Truths. He talked directly about Buddhism on many occasions but often he spoke in mythological terms about the same truths found in Buddhism. He said that none of the myths will tell you that if you are to live you won't suffer, but in teaching you how to recognise the eternal aspect of your temporal experience the myths will teach you how live a properly human life in any circumstance.

When I saw the videos 15 years ago I am pretty sure it was the first time I heard that 'all life is suffering'. I immediately felt this to be true and to be my experience. I heard Joseph Campbell talk about the experience of the eternal or Nirvana which he said is not a place like heaven, but a psychological state of mind or consciousness in which you are released from desire and fear. He also said that Nirvana is right here, in the midst of the turmoil of life. It is the state you find when you are no longer driven to live by compelling desires, fears, and social commitments, when you have found your center of freedom and can act by choice out of that. In considering the Wheel of Becoming or the Wheel of Life, the illumination is the recognition of the radiance of one eternity through all things, whether in the vision of time these things are judged as good or as evil.

Another thing that excited my interest was the idea that we are the cause of all our suffering and that our suffering is to be affirmed and assimilated. Campbell said that one of the great realizations of the Upanishads in the ninth century BCE is that all the gods, all the heavens, all the worlds, are within us and when we turn outward, we see all of these little problems but if we look inward, we see that we are the source of them all. He said that all the gods, all the heavens, all the worlds are magnified dreams, and dreams are manifestations in image form of the energies of the body in conflict with each other. That is what myth is. Myth is a manifestation in symbolic images, in metaphorical images, of the energies of the organs of the body in conflict with each other. This organ wants this, that organ wants that. That is why myths all deal with integration of the mind and body system, whether it is the transition from the childhood state to maturity, or the transition to a richer or more mature condition through a transformation of consciousness.

Joseph Campbell had a lot to say about our experience of time and the eternal. When you move out of the eternal you are in the field of time and hence the field of opposites or duality. He gave the example of the figure of Manjusri holding a sword high over his head; this is the sword of discrimination, separating the merely temporal from the eternal. Or Shiva who has a little drum in one hand that goes tick-tick-tick. That is the drum of time, the tick of time which shuts out the knowledge of eternity. We are enclosed in time. But in Shiva's opposite hand there is a flame which burns away the veil of time and opens our minds to eternity. He said the mystic traditions tell us that it is in our experience of the eternal that we can experience freedom from desire and fear. All this intellectual insight was very well but for a long time I watched these videos and tried to find things to read but did not have a single clue as how to bring about the transformations that Joseph Campbell was talking about. It was not until I came to the Sydney Buddhist Centre that I felt that not only had I come home, but I had found the path and the method to transformation.

Program of Joseph Campbell videos (screening 7:30 pm):

July 16th: The Hero's Adventure
July 23rd: The Message of the Myth
August 20th: The First Storytellers

September 3rd: Sacrifice and Bliss
September 10th: Love and The Goddess
September 17th: The Masks of Eternity

Dying, Death and Renewal

Karen Alexander writes about the forthcoming retreat.

Everything is constantly dying and being reborn. One thought or feeling dissolves into another. So too, every part of our physical body is constantly dying and being renewed. But eventually our breathing stops and we no longer live. Many of us are afraid of dying - but death can also be seen as an opportunity to enter life more wholeheartedly.

A retreat on "Dying, Death and Renewal" will be held for women on Saturday 28 and Sunday 29 August at the Vijayaloka Retreat centre. Led by



Chittaprabha and Karen Alexander, it will provide an opportunity to reflect on and discuss how dying, death and renewal are part of the very nature of life.

The retreat will provide time and space to consider the process of dying and what we might want to happen to us after we die. There will also be discussion about unfinished business and how gratitude and forgiveness can help us to finalise these issues.

Meditation for those in recovery from addiction

Michael Poole writes about his part and his inspiration in the formation of the Lotus Group, who meet every Sunday at the Centre

The first of the Buddha's Four Noble Truths tells us that life is dukkha, often translated as suffering or unsatisfactoriness. When I have expressed this one aspect of the Dharma to non-Buddhist friends, the initial reaction is often along the lines of "well that's a depressing thought". However, the typical response of someone in 12-step recovery from addiction is an accepting "tell me something I don't know", or words to that effect. As someone who has suffered much myself from the effects of addiction (alcohol & drugs) - I have been sober and clean now since July 1992 - I needed no convincing of the First Noble Truth either. My life in active addiction was a largely self-generated hell realm that spanned a decade, from around the age of 17 to one month short of 27. Though we hungry ghosts of addiction have certainly not cornered the market on dukkha, speaking for myself I could have very easily been a poster child for craving, ignorance and delusion. What is important with both recovery and Buddhism however, is that there is a solution! There is a cause for the suffering, a path leading to the end of suffering, and an end to suffering. When I first heard the Four Noble Truths, already some time into my recovery, I almost jumped out of my skin in the enthusiasm of personal identification. Not unlike Buddhism, 12-step recovery programs offer people a path of engaged practice and transformation, a way beyond. In oft quoted words from people in recovery circles, people who are stuck on the suffering aspect alone could be described as "living life in the problem, and not the solution".

Though the language used may be different, many aspects of the recovery process and its 12-steps would seem quite familiar to many Buddhists. In recovery we are encouraged to engage on a journey of awakening to truth through the support of a spiritual community, and to do our best to live by a set of ethical and spiritual principles. We learn to take responsibility for our own actions and the consequences they have, admit our faults and shortcomings to others, and take a regular moral inventory of ourselves. We try and commit ourselves unselfishly to the service of others. We try and cultivate a genuine sense of humility that moves us from a sense of "me" to "we". We are encouraged to take what is called a sponsor, a recovery version of a kalyana mitra or spiritual friend. We are encouraged to live life just one day at a time, fully and mindfully. We work on reducing unskillful aspects of ourselves, and learn to cultivate skillful ones. In recovery there is much talk, and for many, eventual experience, of serenity and peace. Everything is suggestive only, and its left up to ourselves to judge the benefits of any recovery practice from our own experience.

Addiction is often described as a disease of denial. As we often hear in recovery meetings, denial is not just a river in Egypt. This was certainly true in my case, and today I find my prior levels of denial nothing short of astounding. No matter how horrific it got, except towards the very end of my active addiction, I could justify, rationalize and blame everybody and everything else for my predicament. Taking no personal responsibility whatsoever, I was consumed in the sick and selfish ego of my own self-destruction. It was only in recovery that I awakened to my sickness and ignorance, and the process of learning to take personal

responsibility could begin. I was to slowly learn and understand that the drugs and alcohol were but a symptom of my disease; you could say my mind was ultimately the problem. The first verses of the Dhammapada have particular relevance for me!

Experiences are preceded by mind, led by mind, and produced by mind. If one speaks or acts with an impure mind, suffering follows even as the cart-wheel follows the hoof of the ox drawing the cart.

Experiences are preceded by mind, led by mind, and produced by mind. If one speaks or acts with a pure mind, happiness follows like a shadow that never departs.

Dealing with the addiction, putting down the drugs and alcohol, I was then left with a very sick, angry and bewildered self. For while it was one thing to be off the drugs and booze, it was yet another to be happy about it and comfortable in my own skin. It was for this very reason that I needed a path of transformation. Many people assume recovery from addiction means simply putting down the drink or the drugs. The truth is this is only the beginning. Stopping is easy - I've done that countless thousands of times. Staying stopped, and then dealing with life on life's terms inside my own head, now that took a while.

I personally consider that recovery from addiction is a process that ends. I consider myself recovered, but not cured. By that, I mean I can almost guarantee you what will happen if I choose to pick up a drink or a drug today. In no time at all, I will once again be in its grip I have proved this to myself countless times in the past, and have seen others make the same sadly fatal mistake after some time in recovery. Thankfully today its not even a consideration, and has not been so for many years. I very rarely even think about it. I am completely comfortable and at ease in my personal choice, even when others drink alcohol around me. What does not have to end however is that path of personal transformation. Many continue to attend recovery meetings for this very reason (as well as the opportunity for service), even after many years and even decades in recovery After an initial decade of solid recovery work and meetings, since July last year I have chosen to attend meetings only occasionally. That continued transformation I now find in my own going for refuge.

One of the most effective practices for me to continue get to know my own mind is meditation. The Eleventh Step in the 12-step program reminds us what an important part meditation can play in our lives. For people in recovery from addiction, meditation brings them directly to the heart of the problem, and provides a practical path to develop and transform the mind. People in early recovery especially often struggle with a very racing mind, liked a caged animal that has now been released from the dulling anaesthetic effects of booze and drugs. I once heard a person at a meeting jokingly describe it that from the very instant he was awake he heard voices in his head that said "we re glad you re awake, we want to talk to you". Often they may also be struggling with powerful negative emotions or re-surfaced issues in their lives. People with some time in recovery too can be rather complacent at times, and yet others can



always build on the good work they may have done. The fact is that no matter at what stage or state of mind one may be in, whether in recovery or not, meditation has the power to transform.

Meditation has so many benefits. For me these include that it allows me to cultivate positive mental states through focus and awareness, and at other times, just as beneficially, brings me face to face with difficult aspects of myself thus providing an immediate opportunity for further work and growth. It can allow me at times to be fully present with myself, or paradoxically, to transcend myself altogether. Regular practice allows me to take the benefits gained on the cushion, and put it increasingly into play in my life off the cushion. It can allow me the presence of mind to consciously act skilfully, rather than unconsciously react in those old negative habitual ways. Though I have been personally meditating in recovery for a period of around nine years now, it was for some years a very haphazard and clumsy affair. For whilst recovery suggests meditation, its left up to the individual to choose a path of learning for themselves. So it was not until I came to Buddhism around 5 years ago that my practice got more serious and at least somewhat informed. My now daily practice is stronger than ever, and its benefits are manifesting everywhere. Everyone can of course find such benefits in meditation practice, but I am increasingly excited about its potential for deeper exploration by others in recovery like myself.

It was partly for this reason that I had been giving some serious thought since early 2002 to offering some kind of meditation practice at the Sydney Buddhist Centre for people in recovery. With my lessening involvement at meetings, I was mindful of the fact that I not only enjoyed working with others in recovery, but that it was indeed a privilege. I had in those first ten years been very involved in various levels of service work, and though I was to a much lesser degree still involved in some other ways, I was looking for ways to maintain what I saw as an important practice in my life. As previously mentioned, service work is strongly encouraged in 12-step fellowships. It would seem to me that if out of the experience of my own pain I am able to assist others in theirs, in even a small way, then it would be a great waste not to share that. I see it as a kind of responsibility, but one I do gladly out of sheer gratitude for what others have done for me over the years.

I had been thinking about incorporating meditation and meetings for people in recovery for quite a number of years. After getting involved with the Buddhist Centre are gave the matter some more serious thought. With the encouragement and support of Khemadhamma, we decided to run a full day program. The format was quite simple. It consisted of a meeting to start, providing everyone an opportunity to share, two talks on meditation given by Khemadhamma and myself, followed by two brief further talks and guided practice on both the Mindfulness of Breathing and the Metta Bhavana. The first 11th Step Meditation Day was run in June 2002 with about 12 people in attendance. Following on from the very positive feedback we got from that day, we ran a second day in November 2002, and this time word of mouth meant we had about 20 people in attendance. It was great to see people at both days from various 12-step fellowships.

It had been my hope from the beginning that if we got the

support, I would like to do something on a smaller scale on a more regular basis. It was clear from the feedback we got that this was exactly what many people wanted. But what format should such a meeting take? I wanted it to run for 90 minutes, the length of most recovery meetings. I also wanted the meeting to incorporate what I saw as the two core components: meditation and sharing. I found the inspiration for the answer to this question in a book by William Alexander called *Cool Water, Alcoholism, Mindfulness & Ordinary Recovery* (printed in 1997 by Shambhala Publications, USA). The author is a Buddhist and himself a recovering alcoholic. William Alexander gave an example of a meeting format that, with a few modifications of my own, provided me with the very format I was seeking. The concept was simple, yet perfect. Sitting in a large circle and facing each other, the meeting starts with a bell that sounds the start of a 20 minute meditation session, of individual choosing. Remaining in the meditation position, people then have the opportunity to share, and show their intent by bowing to the group first. Keeping within the meditation theme, people are invited to share what is going on in their lives at the current time, be it positive or negative. Everyone remains in silence till the next person decides to share, and this continues till the meeting ends with the sound of the bell.

We decided to run the meetings on the first Sunday of each month (7.00pm - 8.30pm), and so the first Lotus Group Meditation Meeting began in May 2003.

The wonderful transformative symbolism of the lotus provided, I thought, a most appropriate name for the group. As each month passed and support grew even further, the decision was made that from early July the meetings would continue on a weekly basis. As with the 11th Step Meditation Days, we have kept an open invitation for all people in recovery to attend the Lotus group, and it has been most pleasing to again see a wide variety of fellowships involved. Those attending are mostly either from AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) or NA (Narcotics Anonymous), but we have also been supported by members from GA (Gamblers Anonymous), OA (Overeaters Anonymous) and SLA (Sex & Love Anonymous). The meetings are also open to those in recovery from addiction not involved in 12-step fellowships.

Both the 11th Step Meditation Days and the Lotus Group have never had the intention of being either an official 12-step meeting, nor for that matter a Buddhist one. Wanting to assist the broadest range of people as possible, the only criteria was that you were in recovery from addiction and were interested in meditating and sharing with like-minded people. So whilst they have been influenced by both traditions, they are really somewhat of an open bridge between them. The 12-step program emphasises a spirituality of each individuals choosing, so while a number of those who have attended have identified at least somewhat with Buddhism, there are others who do not. It has been pleasing to see that many of those who have had an interest in Buddhism have benefited being introduced to the Centre and have chosen further involvement. A number of people from both the 11th Step Meditation Days as well as the Lotus Group have over the last year attended classes, courses, and even retreats. And yet with the open and simple approach to the meetings, those with no or little Buddhist affiliation also feel welcome and free to share their own



Noble Friendship (cont'd)

thoughts, spirituality and experiences. Some are already experienced meditators and some are only meditation beginners, yet there is already a strong sense of spiritual community with each learning from the other. All monies raised has been 100% donated to the upkeep of the Centre. We now have a strong core group of regular attenders to the Lotus Group, and as word slowly spreads, our numbers are gradually building up. I also hope to continue to run at least a few 11th Step Meditation Days a year to provide newcomers with some meditation instruction and direct guided meditation practice and as a way of introducing new people to the regular Lotus Group Meditation Meeting.

My dream of a meditation meeting for



people in recovery from addiction is now a reality. I would like to personally thank those sangha members who believed in and allowed my vision to come to fruition, and a special thanks must go to Khemadhamma for his undying friendship, support and attendance at the Days and evening meetings..

When I see others like myself who were once in the grip of addiction, peacefully meditating and sharing their experience, strength and hope with each others, it fills me with a deep sense of joy and gratitude. The journey for this once poster child of greed, ignorance and delusion has certainly been an interesting one. Its with serenity and a great enthusiasm that I look ahead to what the future may bring.

Female Deities in Buddhism

Shauna Winram reviews a recent release by Windhorse Publications

For those people who are particularly into Windhorse books, an interesting exercise is to read Subhuti and Vessantara at the same time. The contrast in textures gives one an inkling of the diversity of those who tread the spiritual path and share a common goal. It's like putting ice cream with lemonade; they make a surprisingly great combination.

In the past, whilst reading Vessantara, I have been moved by the incredible depth of his poetic simplicity. 'Female Deities in Buddhism' is no exception. The quote on the front cover of the book seems to reflect much of his disposition

"...her face breaks into a smile of such beauty and tenderness that the whole world trembles with joy."

It's a mistake to read Vessantara quickly. Like a still mountain lake, it's perhaps best to just sit quietly on the edge for a while, to slowly watch Prajnaparamita, or perhaps White Tara, emerge from the vast blue sky. To let the gentleness of the words sink down deep, past the reflections on the surface, until they are transformed into images of immense colour and beauty.

"Transcendental wisdom is both soft and hard. It is soft in the sense that it is subtle and elusive. If you try to grasp it directly you will always fail. It comes to you gently, from the side, as it were - from a 'direction' you cannot cover. It is hard in the sense that it smashes to pieces all our mundane ideas about reality."

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