



UU Sangha

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Buddhist Adventures of a Young UU

by Jeff Wilson

"NAM MYOHO RENGE KYOI NAM MYOHO RENGE KYOI YO YO YO!" rapped four whiteboys from Connecticut as I sat under my umbrella in New York City's Union Square, surrounded on all sides by gray skyscrapers and madly rushing taxi cabs. The crowd of about a thousand---full of Caucasians, Latinos, and Asians, but at least 50% African-American---enthusiastically rapped the mantra back at them, shaking and boogieing before the stage. I scribbled a few notes in my pad and tapped my foot with the beat. It was just another day in the wild, weird world of NYC Buddhism.

A lot of Unitarian-Universalists interested in Buddhism live in areas where they have little or no contact with other Buddhists or trained Dharma teachers. But in New York City I've got so much Buddhism at my fingertips that it took me months to do the research necessary for my "Buddhist Guide to New York" (due out from St. Martin's Press in November). And let me say something to the nightstand and cyber-Buddhists out there: the real thing, when experienced in all its diversity, is about as strange, comic, and fascinating as you could imagine.

Take the Soka Gakkai folks, who were putting on the rainy festival I attended. Here was a community whose commitment to racial inclusivity puts our whitebread congregations to shame. They perform gay marriages, spend significant amounts of time and money on social justice, and don't shave their heads or perform strict austerities to become holy. They too respect the inherent worth of all people, recognize the interdependent web of all things, and believe in a direct, personal quest for meaning. But they also think that repeatedly chanting their mantra can help you acquire a new car or job (Tina

Turner swears it helped her become a star), and that the holy power of the universe is contained in a scroll penned by a megalomaniacal Japanese priest who died 700 years ago. What's a UU to make of all this?

Or how about the apartment downtown where college professors sit facing the wall and try to achieve sudden enlightenment while an Irish-American lesbian Zen Master performs elaborately stylized rituals in the middle of the room? Or the loft in midtown where a Socratic discussion in the finest classical Greek style is being held: the participants are energetically debating an ancient Indian how-to manual for aspiring Buddhas, with moderation from an American Buddhist monk who sells high-fashion accessories based on his robes and a wizened Tibetan man who claims to be a reincarnated saint. Or the Buddhist Church uptown, where parishioners sing hymns with organ accompaniment, pass the collection plate, and listen quietly to a Sunday-morning sermon from the minister while paying their respects to the Amida Buddha, whose universal grace ensures them rebirth in the Western Paradise of Pure Bliss?

With so much diversity, one begins to wonder what exactly the common thread is that holds all these different ideas and practices together as "Buddhism." And the more Buddhism(s) one rubs up against, the more it becomes apparent that the little nibble UUs are taking only encompasses a small percentage of the religion as a whole.

One of the most interesting things to me about my explorations in the chaotic sub-culture of NYC Buddhism is how both elements of Buddhism that coincide with and conflict with Unitarian-Universalist values and styles offer useful lessons. For instance, take the UU principle of the inherent worth and dignity of all people, and compare it to the Buddhist idea of inherent Buddha-nature. There's certainly some obvious similarities between these two sentiments, and they help to flesh each other out. The UU principle seems to make a statement a priori about the worth of human beings,

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Editorial Insights

Report from General Assembly 2000

For the UU Buddhist Fellowship, the General Assembly in Nashville was a good time and a time of firsts. We had a banner for the first time. It is striking (see our web site). It was made by Beth Haggart, a member of the Zen Affiliate of Vermont. The background is a dark saffron yellow, the lettering red. The lotus is white with black edging. Bob Senghas and Sam Trumbore carried it in the Banner parade, and afterwards it hung in our booth in the exhibit hall. The booth was another first for UUBF. Our table was stocked with information sheets about Buddhism, copies of back and current issues of the UU Sangha and copies of the Faith/Mind Sutra. In addition we had three books for sale: *This Very Moment: Faith of a UU Buddhist* by our own James Ford, *Opening the Lotus: A Woman's Guide to Buddhism* by Sandy Boucher, and *Miracle of Mindfulness* by Thich Nhat Hanh. We sold out all but three books! In addition James' newly published pamphlet, *The Faith of a Buddhist* was available. Many people stopped by the booth with questions and twenty-seven people signed on as new members.

On Friday James lead a panel discussion. Its title was "Returning to the World with Bliss-Bestowing Hands." Bob Schaibly and I were the other panel members. I must note here that the following day there was a long front-page article about GA in the Nashville daily, *The Tennessean*, and the reporter chose to highlight our panel discussion, starting with the comment that, "125 people crammed into a small meeting room for a workshop on Buddhist practices among UUs." There was, in fact, standing room only. The reporter goes on to quote James as follows, "We, as Buddhists, are bringing some interesting gifts to the Unitarian Universalist Association, and UUs are bring interesting gifts to Buddhism."

We look forward to next years GA in Cleveland, when we hope to expand our offerings and arrange a time for daily meditation.

Dorrie Senghas

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Faithfully yours,
Sam

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without explaining why we should be regarded as valuable and dignified. Applying the idea of Buddha-nature, we can say that this inherent goodness comes from the potential of every person to become a compassionate, wise, helpful human being who works to alleviate the suffering of other people. And because Buddha-nature resides in all sentient beings, the UU statement can be stretched further to become more encompassing: we affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of all living things.

On the other hand, there are elements of Buddhism that at first seem to directly contradict our regular way of thinking about the proper approach to religion. We often like to think of Buddhism as a rational, non-theistic method for people to seek their own mental freedom. For many our Buddhist ideal might be an enlightened Zen master who disdains prayer, scriptures, and ritual---he just meditates, achieves a breakthrough, and doesn't fuss with all the trappings of religion that Unitarians often seem so scornful of. But that's hardly how most people practice and understand the Dharma: I received holy water blessings from Theravadin monks who tied sacred strings around my wrist, learned about Chinatown believers who release thousands of turtles into Central Park every year to generate merit, and had my fortune told for a dollar at a temple. One Japanese group I met with believes that misfortune in one's life is caused by the lingering bad karma and evil spirits left over from the past, and advocates purification rituals and exorcisms as the most expedient religious practices.

Perhaps the most extreme example of this apparent irrationality is Pure Land Buddhism, which is the largest, most widespread form of Buddhism practiced today. Everywhere I went, from Japanese to Chinese to Korean to Tibetan to Vietnamese temples, I encountered images of Amitabha Buddha, the savior Buddha of Infinite Light and Life, which people prayed before. The people at the Buddhist Church of New York told me that enlightenment cannot be achieved by one's own efforts--it comes solely as a gift from the Other Power. Doesn't this go against everything we've been taught as self-reliant, self-confidently agnostic Unitarians?

In struggling with this seemingly contradictory Buddhist teaching, however, I came to realize how familiar it really was. Our denomination is formed from the marriage of two great, courageous faith traditions: the Unitarians and the Universalists. And the more I practiced and examined Pure Land Buddhism, the more I realized that it was remarkably similar to the good news our own Universalist forefathers and mothers spread throughout the land. The Pure Landers say: don't worry about having a bad rebirth, because the nature of the universe is inherently compassionate and will shepherd

you to happiness and wisdom. Spiritual attainment comes through humility, thankfulness, and the desire to bring joy to others, not subtly ego-driven quests for purity, holiness, and self-generated wisdom. As I came to appreciate and respect the deep modesty, sincerity, and generosity of the Pure Land Buddhists I chanted with, I realized that these same values had been passed on to me through the historically Universalist church I grew up in. A desire arose in me to go back and understand my own theological ancestors and their wisdom more deeply. The Buddhists who had at first seemed the most different from me, in the end gave me back a crucial part of my past that I'd forgotten I'd left behind.

There are limits to just how much one can learn from the truly odd, of course. I didn't take away much of value from the New Jersey group that claims their leader is Buddha and has communed with intelligent vegetable life on the planet Venus.

Some of these strange differences are just cultural aspects, of course. I remember sitting on a tiny orange child's stool at a *vihara* in residential Queens, my knees up around my ears as I talked with Sri Lankan monks lounging on sofas. Monks command great respect in their tradition, and in their culture one never sits or stands so that one's head is higher than a superior's. This was a challenge when I had to chaperone a little five-foot monk with the hip-hop sounding nickname Bhante G around the city---but let's not pretend that we UUs don't have our own similarly culture-bound rituals and traditions. I never found any equivalent to my church's Committee on Committees at the sanghas I visited, or came across people whose true worship service was Coffee Hour and whose holy water was java.

Perhaps the best lesson to be learned from all this Buddhist spelunking was how wisdom comes packaged in so many different forms. The Lotus Sutra teaches about *upaya*, the idea that different people need different methods and symbols in order to understand the universe, and that all sincere spiritual pilgrims will reach the summit regardless of their path. It's a deep truth that we explicitly affirm in our own UU sources, wherein we call attention to the value of Jewish, Christian, Humanist, Pagan, and mystic insights, as well as the wisdom of all the prophets who shone light on what it takes to live a meaningful human life. Certainly my UU upbringing gave me the tools to navigate this diverse world of Buddhist groups in a respectful, open-minded way. And I found personal benefit from all the different methods of chanting, meditating, visualizing, and thinking that I learned.

What will a Unitarian-Universalist Buddhism look like someday? It's hard to speculate accurately, but it might look something like the Dharma the Won

Buddhists are practicing in their little gray temple by the Queensboro Bridge. Their leadership is nearly 70% female, just as more than 50% of our own current seminarians are women. They are fundamentally oriented toward applying Buddhist teachings to everyday life in the real world, and believe that spiritual progress should match ever-increasing material progress. They avoid elaborate rituals and systems of symbolism, worshipping before the simple image of a perfect black circle on a white background, representing the pure, naturally whole nature of the universe. Instead of golden Buddha statues, they focus on recognizing the Buddhas lying within the everyday people they meet on the streets. They teach that the scriptures must be understood in light of modern knowledge and science, while maintaining moderate devotional chanting to help open the heart and develop compassion and gratitude. Lay people elect a board of directors for each Won temple and have significant governing power over the group's activities and finances. Their sense of compassion and interconnectedness drives them to agitate for world peace at the United Nations and perform community service in their neighborhood. And interestingly, they keep personal journals of their spiritual activities throughout the day, checking off when they perform the minimum number of charitable deeds and traditional practices advocated by their ministers.

Whatever may lie in our futures, I know I've had a fun and thought-provoking experience as a Unitarian-Universalist getting to know more about the myriad ways in which people approach the Dharma. Even the absurdities--like the diminutive Chinese nun who runs a vegetarian restaurant that doubles as a temple dedicated to a gigantic War Bodhisattva--held hidden teachings. And of course for every absurdity I encountered I found three things that made me grateful for my opportunities to explore Buddhism in depth. In the end, the really gratifying thing was how I found that Buddhism helped me be a better UU, and being a UU helped me be a better Buddhist. I hope everyone will have the chance someday to enjoy such a colorful Dharma adventure.

Jeff Wilson is a lifelong UU who grew up in the Universalist Church of West Hartford (CT). He is now a member of the Community Church of New York, where he has participated in UU Buddhist activities. He is a former member of the editorial staff at "Tricycle: The Buddhist Review." His first book, "The Buddhist Guide to New York: Where to Go, What to Do, and How to Make the Most of the Fantastic Resources in the Tri-state Area" (St. Martin's Press) will be available in November.

Dharma Couples

This edited exchange of emails on UUBF-L at the end of July caught your editor's attention and got him thinking it would make a good article. The reader is encouraged to contact the authors with your views by subscribing to our Internet list UUBF-L (instructions on page 2).

Karan Gardner:

I have a topic I would like to open for discussion--one that I am thinking through from a Buddhist perspective but which I feel is something that can be explored from many perspectives, and one that was introduced to me.

It seems to me that often the focus of spirituality is on the individual: what practices, for example, an individual should follow in order to reach enlightenment--what meditations, what studies, what activities, etc.

I would like to propose the prospect of there being a "couples" spirituality that unfolds from within a relationship between two people and allows them to journey through life, as it were, with a shared vision and shared wisdom, to realize enlightenment in this life through their relationship with one another, within their familial community/sangha.

Now, from what I understand, a Bodhisattva is one who aspires to become a fully awakened one (a Buddha) and who makes a commitment (via vows) to relieving the suffering of all beings for as long as there is suffering in the world, and who forgoes entering Nirvana until all suffering has been relieved.

A Bodhisattva's actions, from what I've read, are guided by certain practices (and I really wish I had more knowledge about this). These practices, as I understand them, include such things as meditating without distraction, renouncing attachment to this life, not committing unwise deeds, being full of compassion, being patient, without irritation or resentment towards anyone, examining our errors and faults in order to separate from them, not criticizing others or speaking of their errors, abandoning all coarse and vulgar language, being attentive to whatever situation presents itself and the reaction it awakens in our mind, not killing, not taking what is not given, not misusing sexuality, not praising oneself while putting others down, etc.

That said, what I'm wondering is how it would be if two people committed individually, first, to such a way of living came together and formed a bond, creating a home that was based in such a way of being. I'm wondering how the above practices would be applied in a couples situation; how beautifully the two people would relate; how beautiful the home would be that they

built; how peaceful and loving their family; and what wonderful models they would be for others.

These days there is much suffering in the world due to the breakdown of the family unit. There seems to be an awful lack of shared vision based in shared spirituality. How wonderful I think it would be for our world to begin re-establishing that type of environment for people to live in and for children to grow up in. What a difference it could make.

A recent inquiry of the same nature presented to my online writers community, I received the following note from one member, Jion Prosser, a Tendai priest living in Japan:

My question to the writers community was:

Is the foundation of the experience expressed in living out the Bodhisattva vows through the paramitas as couple's vows? In other words, it is like two people choosing flowers together and putting them in one vase upon the altar?

His response:

Well, just to spout personally here :) , I myself am married. My wife, a wonderful Japanese woman, and I have two children as well. I wouldn't say it's anything particularly special about Buddhism that holds my wife's attention (somewhat akin to a "portion" of Japanese culture), but I've often felt that the ideals inherent in how Buddhism teaches us to view other people can lend great strength to marriages and partnerships between people committed to each other. We are told through parables and prose alike that we are, in the end, not as separate as we'd like to think from these other folks that "bump into" our lives. How the provisional aspect of "that other guy" fades as a wisp of incense smoke when we learn about dependent origination. When we can take this to the mind level and apply this to thoughts also, well, I think we've struck on a mighty fine idea that might bring us both better awareness of our partner and greater resilience to weather the tougher parts of cooperation.

I enjoyed your simile in regards to "putting the flowers together on the altar." I felt that strikes right to the heart of it. We might also think of the Bodhisattva vow as indeed marrying us to everyone! Think of that (and talk about alimony if ya ever split up!). By truly coming to grips with what it means to display Wisdom-Compassion (not pity) as a Bodhisattva, we can't limit this to merely our spouses. It is as though our implementation of the Bodhisattva Heart expands to fill a vacuum greater than ourselves. This has been misunderstood in the

past I believe and used as an excuse for sexual and mental manipulation, therefore, it might be an area we'd better consult with our teacher upon.

William Brockmann responded:

Karan Gardner envisions a world where couples journey through life with a shared vision and shared wisdom, to realize enlightenment in a home characterized by all the virtues you can think of plus a few more. And she wonders "how it would be if two people committed to such a way of living came together and formed a bond, creating a home that was based in such a way of being."

That's a nice dream (or vision if you prefer), but I can't conceive of myself and wife achieving such perfection or any other couple for that matter. And in the very unlikely case where everyone reached that lofty plateau of perfection, how would we be distinguished one from another? No one would be holier than thou or less holier than thou either. In other words, the statistical bell curve of human traits would be reduced to a dot.

Maybe some folks would like it that way, but I prefer the way it is now, where there are a few very good people and a few very bad people, with most of the rest of us falling somewhere in the middle hump.

Maybe we should strive for perfection, but I-for one hope I never make it. My wife assures me that I have nothing to worry about.

Phil Gable responded:

I was very touched by Karan Gardner's post. But I hesitated to respond until Bill Brockman offered a reply. Gassho, Bill for letting us look a bit into your life and giving me the courage to post this. My wife Paula and I got married with a shared vision something like what I understood Karan to describe.

A little background. Paula is a UU ministerial candidate who is currently serving her internship as a community minister here in Lancaster, PA. She will complete her studies in 2001 to become certified as a marriage and family therapist. She's 37. I'm 52 and winding down a 30 year career in marketing and advertising. When Paula's graduated, I'll be free to pursue my next career as a Mediator. I'm certified in mediation, including divorce mediation and currently volunteer at our local mediation center where I also serve on the Board. Eventually mediation will become my livelihood, my "monk's work" or right livelihood if you will. I'm a student of the Reverend Patricia Dai-En Bennage who heads Mount Equity Zendo in Pennsdale. Once a month I travel to MEZ for 3 day sesshin. I aspire to ordination but exactly how this will work out remains

to be seen. Paula attends sesshin with me, as possible. We both attend the UU church in Lancaster and sit with a local group. Paula also practices in a contemplative yoga tradition at home and with a local group.

Five years ago on about our third date, I made dinner for Paula in my home. Neither of us was looking for a marriage partner nor were we closed to the idea. Both of us had experienced disastrous marriages which were based on romantic love. The subject had come up in our conversations and so that evening I shared what's written below with Paula by way of increasing our understanding of each other's values. This was something I had written over an intense and difficult 12 month period of my life which had included among many other things a kind of first awakening or kensho experience.

Later, Paula told me that when I read it it sounded to her like a marriage contract and that she knew then that she wanted to commit to it. (I guess that's as close as one can get to "love at first sight" in an intentional relationship :-)

AN INTENTIONAL RELATIONSHIP

- The giving and receiving of love If you feel unheard, I will listen respectfully and without judgment. (listen/compassion)
- If you feel afraid, I will give you my gentleness that you may know your strength. (protect/be secure)
- If you are wounded, I will nurture you with understanding and compassion. (nurture/heal)
- If you want wisdom, I will show you all that I do not know. (teach/learn)
- If you are beset by the demands of daily life, I will do the things that must be done. (work/contentment)
- These I will do without conditions, or expectations, or hope of reward. I will do them as you ask, as best as I am able, so that we may trust one another. (trust/be trusted)

The parenthetical "/" phrases at the end are a kind of shorthand note to myself. My experience is that there are certain corollary principles at work in the universe of human relations. Like the one we're most familiar with "When I teach, I learn." As I said, I wrote this piece over the course of a year or so, not as it occurred to me, but as I lived and experienced it and made it part of my practice. For example, I noticed that when I was mindful about work, even cleaning the toilet could bring contentment and a certain peace of mind. So the parenthetical expressions are what I found to be the

guiding principles, the heuristics, *not the benefits*, of relating to people in an intentional loving manner.

A little more explanation. These vows, (actually they became our *marriage vows* a year after that dinner date) are just words on a page unless there's some concrete doing associated with them. So here's what it looks like on the ground.

Listening. Number one is listening. Real listening. We set aside at least 15 minutes each day taking the time to hear the other person. Even if it's just about how bad the traffic was on the way home. We try to practice listening whenever we communicate. It's just a matter of being mindful when someone is speaking or telling them that your attention is distracted. Not shouting from one end of the house to the other. Letting the machine pick-up during dinner. Taking 3 breaths and noticing them before answering the phone. I can honestly and truthfully say that we've never had a fight in 5 years of marriage. We've had disagreements which we resolve by listening and not expecting to get our own way on anything

Gentleness. Many men and women feel physically powerless and it affects how they relate to others. I see this all the time as I instruct white belts in the Tae Kwon Do Studio. So this precept is simply about respect for another person's sense of safety. It means I'm mindful about how I move, and touch and make love.

Learning. We read to each other. Anything and everything that we find interesting we share. Sometimes we'll leave an item on the other person's chair but mostly we wait until we can talk about it. Along with this goes the idea of not being attached to knowledge. Of not being so sure of our understanding that a new understanding can't reach us. Or as my teacher is fond of saying, "nobody ever graduates."

Working. It simply means that everyday chores like cleaning the house as well as our "regular jobs" become part of mindfulness practice. There's an erasable board in the kitchen where we can post whatever chore we think needs tending to. From mowing to cleaning to errands. When one of us has time we take something off the list. This is an opportunity for a kind of mindfulness practice for us. When dusting shelves, just dust shelves. Just this morning, Paula plunked a basket of clothes from the dryer on the bed and said with a laugh, "How about a little "folding clothes" meditation?" So 10 minutes of my usual sitting was spent folding clothes. No problem.

Trusting. The last part of the piece simply reminds me of the fact that following these precepts has to be unconditional. It can't be: "I'll only nurture you, if you nurture me." Otherwise you spend your whole life keeping score and trying to get even in one sense of that

phrase or another. It also points to the parenthetical corollaries. Those are the real "rewards" of intentional love. We feel heard and compassion comes naturally. We feel safe. We feel nurtured and we heal. We learn. Things get done and we feel content. Trust is mutual. All in all, it adds up to peace. Peace in our lives and peace in our hearts.

To sum it up, what Paula and I have together isn't romantic love in the heart pounding, sweaty palms sense of that phrase. What we have is intentional love. A decision and vow to live this way together for as long as its possible. I've done the romantic love thing. So has Paula. It's not nearly as satisfying or peaceful as what we're doing now.

These past five years have been the best of my adult life.

Bill, please don't think I'm holding this out as "perfect" or "holier than thou." That fear almost prevented me from posting this. But my truth is, that I do understand my life to be perfect just the way it is, in each moment. It's only when I'm not mindful and compassionate that it doesn't seem so.

The Art of Living

by Art Hansen

Purpose of Life

The Dalai Lama said that the purpose of our life is to seek happiness. Whether one believes in religion or not, whether one believes in this religion or that religion, we all are seeking something better in life. So, he says, I think, the very motion of our life is toward happiness.

While human life was in a primitive stage, we were part of a group by necessity. We did not operate as individuals, but a part of a group. The ego had not developed. I believe that the simple, although dangerous and burdensome life may have had more happiness because the attitudes of hate, anger and greed had not yet developed in the mind of humans.

After we became more "civilized" we developed as individuals. As individuals, our ego evolved and we acted to enhance that ego—to do our own thing, to be better than the rest, to be number one! In the process we developed some bad habits that became part of our consciousness. Some of our consciousness is inherited, other parts we developed in our own lives. While the purpose of our lives may be to seek happiness, we generally ignore this goal, and alternatively, we water the seeds of unhappiness in our consciousness. Through this we succeed in achieving unhappiness.

What is happiness

We should not confuse pleasure and happiness. Pleasure is a short-lived feeling as a result of sensation of touch, sight, sound, taste, or thought. Some may define happiness as winning the lottery. I call this a pleasure. First comes the thought of what pleasures the money can buy—a nice car, a vacation home, a boat, travel, parties with friends, etc. Then you would indulge in these pleasures for a time. Studies of lottery winners show that they have happiness or pleasure for a while, then return to the same level of happiness they had prior to the winning of the lottery.

Maybe happiness is indeed a warm puppy. A warm puppy is a symbol of happiness and contentment. There is warmth, compassion and love between the puppy and the beholder. At the time, both are living in the present moment. The puppy is like the rose as seen by Emerson, *There is simply the rose; it is perfect in every moment of its existence. . . . man cannot be happy and strong until he too lives with nature in the present.* The rose, the warm puppy and the beholder exist in the present moment. Happiness is manifest in a state of peace and tranquility in oneself, in the family and community.

Sources of Happiness

St. Francis of Assisi said in the last half of his well-known prayer,

*O Divine Master,
grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love,
for it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and
it is in death to the self that we are born to eternal life.*

The sources of happiness are your own actions of compassion, love, understanding, forgiveness, generosity, deep listening, and helping others. We all need to reclaim our innate state of happiness. We need to exercise our own intuitive state of human warmth and compassion. When we connect with others and are intimate with our partner and family members, we start to regain our happiness.

Another source of happiness is connecting with nature. We are connected deep within; we need to realize this connection. Recently my wife and I spent a weekend at a meditation retreat at an old farm in West Virginia. The theme of the retreat was, "Walking in Beauty". While on a meditation walk, I realized what was to me a new meaning of beauty. We have evolved with nature over thousands of millennia. Thich Nhat Hanh likes to use the word, "interbeing", which means we are interconnected with all other beings and the rest of nature. My realization at the retreat was that we can be

interconnected with the nature in which we evolved; and when we are connected, we are connected in beauty because we are all one. What we perceive as beautiful is this natural, wonderful interconnectedness of everything.

What is unhappiness

Unhappiness is the state of not being happy—it is suffering. Suffering is manifested as hate, anger, anxiety, fear, lust, jealousy, greed, selfishness, sickness and death. I think that you have probably noticed that when you become angry, that an unhappy feeling stays with you for a long time after the incident that made you angry.

Sources of unhappiness

These states of mind, while lingering, cloud the judgment. They can just make you unhappy and regretful; but even worse, they can cause you to make mistakes through poor judgment that only add to your unhappiness. Your physical actions and speech that are hurting or harmful cannot make you happy; they cause regret and emotional disturbance to what may have been a calm state of mind. Watching and performing acts of violence, injury, and misconduct have a lasting effect on your well being. They forge your attitudes, your feelings of what is right and wrong.

The real sources of suffering or unhappiness are the result of your past actions, your karma. You have built up the seeds of unhappiness in your consciousness. Thich Nhat Hanh says that if you water these unwholesome seeds they will grow and create even more unhappiness in the future. In the past an event occurred and you reacted with anger. A sound has been perceived as an indication of impending injury and you reacted with fear. These reactions have been reinforced many times and will be reinforced and grow in the future unless we take action.

The underlying culprit is our attitude—a deep-seated reaction. Our attitude is the result of our karma—our past actions. Attitude is our innate response to external stimuli. Unwholesome attitudes must be changed if we want happiness.

Ego is often the source of unhappiness. This can be the deep-seated reason for intuitive or knee-jerk reactions to stimuli that result in anger, hatred, fear and other sources of unhappiness.

Unfortunately, our unwholesome attitudes, the seeds of our unhappiness lie at the depths of our consciousness. It is not easy to change them.

Path to happiness

Psychotherapists try to find the cause of suffering and try to show people how they can treat the cause of their suffering. One of the great teachings of the Buddha 2500 years ago is that suffering exists, that there is a

cause of suffering, that suffering can be eliminated and there is a path to end suffering.

The first steps on the path are contained in the Five Mindfulness Trainings as taught by Thich Nhat Hanh. He has interpreted the precepts taught by the Buddha in modern terms. These trainings or precepts describe two of the elements of the path, i.e., right action and right speech. The essence of these trainings are:

1. Be aware of suffering caused by the destruction of life, and commit to a reverence of life and the environment. Don't take anything that belongs to another and practice loving kindness and generosity of your time, energy and resources.
2. Refrain from sexual misconduct—enter into a relationship only with a prerequisite of love and a long-term commitment.
3. Refrain from harmful speech. Cultivate loving speech and deep listening.
4. Commit to cultivating good health by practicing mindful eating, drinking and consuming. Refrain from ingesting toxins into your body and mind.

Meditation and mindfulness are essential elements of the path. Meditation helps calm the mind and can lead to insight. Mindfulness is living in the present moment and being aware of our body and mind and what is really happening in the here and now.

Bringing about change

If you realize that you have problems and that the cause of these problems is not external but within you, you can decide to correct the source of the problem. Your problems will not go away by changing jobs, partners or where you live. You can only make the correction yourself and this correction must be made within. No other human or a god can fix the problem—it is only you that can fix it. You are the only source of your salvation.

To make a change you must move toward something rather than away. Move toward embracing a happy life, to the joy of living.

First you must decide that you should start on the path to happiness. You must have a real determination and dedication to follow the path. A teacher is useful in helping you understand the path and guide you along the way. It is good to have other persons with a similar pursuit to help you. But in the end, it is you that must tread the path yourself; Jesus, the Buddha or Allah can't

do it for you. They can show you the way, but you must walk the path yourself. The teaching is that Jesus, the Buddha or Allah is already inside of you and all that you ever wanted to know is within—you just have to look for it and find it. When the disciple Thomas asked Jesus how will we know when the Kingdom of God has come, Jesus said that the Kingdom of God is already here, it is inside of you and around you. Man just does not recognize it. The Buddha said the same thing about the Pure Land or nirvana. It is up to you to exert the right effort.

The Dalai Lama teaches that an antidote to unwholesome mind states is wholesome actions. Acts of compassion, kindness and generosity help overcome attitudes of hatred, anger and greed. The journey is long. After all, it took you a long time to generate your karma. It will take a long time to erase the mistakes of the past. If you are mindful and recognize your anger, fear, and ego induced actions, you can slowly correct your actions and thereby slowly change your attitudes and reactions. This is accomplished by watering the wholesome seeds in our consciousness while we refrain from watering the unwholesome seeds. Cultivate the positive states of mind and start to eliminate the negative states of mind.

The first half of the prayer of St. Francis goes like this:

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace,
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.*

Spirituality and living a spiritual life

The art of living happily has many components. It begins with the understanding that happiness and unhappiness exist and that the sources of happiness and unhappiness are within ourselves and in connections outside of ourselves. It involves deciding to follow a path with inner discipline and determination to root out the unwholesome mental states that prevent happiness and replacing them with positive constructive states of mind, such as kindness, tolerance and forgiveness. In identifying the factors that lead to happiness, we conclude that there is a final component called spirituality. You may associate spirituality with religion. I think that is a mistake. Spiritual, to me, means the searching and investigation of the true nature of the mind. Spiritual means seeking the nature of the mind; exploring the aspects of consciousness, perceptions, feelings, the thought process and the relationship with the body. Through this, we come to understand the effects of our behavior, the actions of our body, speech and mind. If you don't understand the karmic results of

what you think and do, there is no way for you to become a spiritual person. It has been said that you are what you think; but I believe it is more that, *you are what you have thought, done, said, seen, heard and the way you have reacted to events in the past.*

Walking the path to happiness is not an intellectual exercise; it is a journey of the mind at the level of feeling, perceptions and the consciousness. It is experiential, not an intellectual or thought process. It is a spiritual journey.

I believe that seeing interbeing and beauty is an important part of the path to happiness and an essential element of the Art of Living. This leads to a gradual change. This is a spiritual path—a journey of the mind. It is a journey worth taking.

The Practice of Ch'an Buddhism: The Bodhisattva Path

by **Bob Oliva**

When I was reading Linda Smith Stowell's article in the winter edition of UU Sangha, I was struck by what she said about an important goal of Buddhist practice: "...the goal is to experience "No Mind" – the state in which one loses all sense of separateness from the larger interconnected reality of which we are a part."

This sentence brought me back to an evening many years ago when my mother was reading to me from a now long forgotten book about Southeast Asia. I remember sitting and looking at my mother as she read a passage about the meeting between a Catholic priest and a Buddhist monk in Vietnam sometime in the early 1960s. The monk was telling the priest of the great beauty of the world. How all things are contained in one lotus flower and how compassion is the heart of the Buddha. I was transfixed. As my mother read, time stood still. To this day, the image of the lotus flower remains fixed in my mind. I felt at peace with the world, open to the world, in love with the Buddha for being so kind to all of us. This experience began a personal search that continues today. I was born and raised Roman Catholic. From a very early age I was enthralled with the life of Jesus. Even today the life and teachings of Jesus are a vital part of my religious life. But I was always looking eastward. Maybe it's been an effort to recapture that moment of ecstasy in listening to the story of the Buddhist monk. I know that it awakened in me the belief that we can experience great joy and peace. I knew then that we don't have to settle for the mere remembrance of events centuries ago. Now is the time that new life is born, that love and compassion burst

forth. My search has led me to Buddhism, specifically to Ch'an.

Ch'an is a form of Chinese Mahayana Buddhism that eventually became what we know in the West as Zen. Ch'an is a wonderful mix of Taoist, Confucianist and Buddhist thinking and method. It deviated from the older Indian Buddhism in embracing spontaneity and paradox in its method and of the ideal of the bodhisattva in its philosophy. It is the bodhisattva ideal that has so intrigued me and which I would like to reflect on briefly.

The Four Great Vows

- I vow to deliver innumerable sentient beings.
- I vow to cut off endless vexations.
- I vow to master limitless approaches to Dharma.
- I vow to attain supreme Buddhahood.

The Four Great Vows are at the heart of Mahayana Buddhism. To practice Buddhism is to benefit others. We do not have to wait until enlightenment comes to work for the welfare and liberation of people. From the very beginning, our choice to walk the path of the Buddha is an acceptance of serving others. We are a part of an interdependent web that links us together. My liberation is yours and yours is mine. As one sutra says: "Those people who have not attained nirvana, help them to attain nirvana." We are all in this together with each one of us reaching out a helping hand.

In the words of Ch'an Master Sheng-yen, a leader of the contemporary revival of Ch'an worldwide, to walk the path of the bodhisattva we go beyond even the Four Noble Truths. "...If our primary intent in practicing Buddhadharma is to benefit other sentient beings, then the Four Noble Truths by themselves are, perhaps, not sufficient." If we strictly follow the Four Noble Truths it is possible to only be concerned with our own liberation. In Ch'an, liberation comes to all. The bodhisattva refuses to enter nirvana for the sake of bringing all sentient beings to enlightenment. It may be said that in Ch'an the ultimate goal is no longer the individual attainment of nirvana but the enlightenment of all beings.

For ordinary sentient beings the Four Great Vows need to be repeated continuously. The vows need to be kept in the forefront of practice. But these are not vows in the usual way we think of them. In Ch'an the Four Great Vows arise naturally as our practice evolves. Some take their vows at the beginning of their practice, some wait until they have developed a deeper faith. No pressure is put on a person to take vows that are not a product of their own decision-making and readiness. I see here a reflection of the Unitarian-Universalist approach to spiritual growth.

When enlightenment is attained one becomes the Four Great Vows. The bodhisattva is inseparable from his vows. The idea of helping others to attain Buddhahood no longer exists outside her mind. "Enlightened beings do what is taught by the early sutras: for sentient beings who do not know about suffering, the enlightened person helps them to know suffering, for sentient beings that do not practice, the enlightened person helps them to practice; for sentient beings who have not attained nirvana, the enlightened person helps them attain nirvana."

It is fitting to quote the words of Tenzin Gyatso, the XIV Dalai Lama and a superb spokesperson for the Mahayana:

Each of us has the responsibility for all mankind. It is time for us to think of other people as true brothers and sisters and to be concerned with their welfare, with lessening their suffering. Even if you cannot sacrifice your own benefit entirely, you should not forget the concerns of others. We should think more about the future and benefit of all mankind.

The bodhisattva path is a path for all living beings. The bodhisattva lives with full awareness of the interconnectedness of our reality. The well being of one is a part of the well being of all. Reality no longer exists separate outside the mind. The mind no longer resides separate from external reality. This fully integrated consciousness bestows awe and wonder, love and compassion, stability of emotion, and concern for the final happiness of all. It was these qualities of life that were expressed to me long ago while listening to my mother. And like the Catholic priest in the novel it is before these qualities of life that I gaze in faithful expectation.

UU Buddhist Practice Groups

To be listed, a group must have both a Buddhist and a UU connection. If you'd like to have yours included here please contact the editor, Sam Trumbore (see page 2 for email and postal address). Due to limitations on space, I can only list the group's name, address, time you meet and a contact person.

Black River Sangha
Unitarian-Universalist Meetinghouse
21 Fairground Road Springfield, Vt.
Thursday evenings at 7pm
Contact person : Richard Ryoha Dunworth M.R.O.
Phone: 802-228-2476

Second Cong. Soc. UU 294 Pleasant St. Concord NH 03303
Meets Wednesdays and Thursdays 7:00-8:30pm
Contact: the Rev. Marcel Duhamel 603-224-0291

Martha's Vineyard Vipassana Meditation
Unitarian-Universalist Church (1/2 block beyond Library) 238 Main
Street Vineyard Haven, MA 02568
Tuesday mornings from 10:15 ~ 11:45 AM
Contact: Jo Rice 508-693-2827 jscotrice@capecod.net

Buddhist Explorers Group
The Community Church of NY
40 East 35 St. NY NY 10016
Meets 1st Sunday of the month, 12:45 pm
and 1st and 3rd Tuesday evenings 6:45 pm
Contact: Gary Jacinto (212-267-2694)

Zazen & a Mindful Meal
UU Church of Lancaster
538 W. Chestnut Street Lancaster, PA 17603
fourth Fridays @ 6:30pm
Contact: Phil & Paula (717) 295-3041
email: pgable@redrose.net

Mindfulness Meditation Group
Unitarian Church of Harrisburg
1280 Clover Lane Harrisburg, PA 17113 717-564-6741
Contact: George Hellmann 717-236-6749
email: jghellmann@mindspring.com

Unitarian Universalist Church in Reston
1625 Wiehle Avenue
Reston, VA 20190 (703) 742-7992
Sundays from 7:30 to 9 p.m., meditation/discussion
Contact: Mel Harkrader-Pine (703) 707-9332 (h)
email: melhpine@aol.com

Insight Meditation Community of Washington
Teacher: Tara Brach
Location: River Road Unitarian Church, Bethesda, MD
Phone: 301 562-7000 Email: meditate@imcw.org
Web site: <http://users.erols.com/imcw/index.html>

Mindfulness Practice Group
UU Church of Annapolis, MD
Contacts: Art Hansen, Rev. Fred Muir (410)-266-8044

Meditation Group (Vipassana)
Mt. Vernon Unitarian Church
1909 Windmill Lane Alexandria, VA 22307
703-660-0028 mvuchill@juno.com / forrest@offchance.com
meets weekly on Sundays at 7pm
Teachers: Forrest Tobey & Lynnell Lewis

The Buddhist Fellowship
Unitarian Universalist Church of Arlington, Virginia
4444 Arlington Boulevard, Arlington, VA 22204
Routine Schedule: Meditation every Monday, 7:30-9:00 pm;
Dharma Discussion the 1st/3rd Sundays 12:45-2:00 pm.
Contact: Michael I. Roehm, Coordinator: (202) 332-7236
email: mroehm@earthlink.net

Eno River Buddhist Community
Eno River Unitarian Universalist Fellowship
4907 Garrett Road Durham, NC 27707
Contact: Steve Seiberling 919/968-4445

email: sseiber@email.unc.edu

First Church Sangha
First Unitarian Church Linton St. Cincinnati, OH 45201
meets 6:15-7:30am Tuesday and 5:30-7:00pm Thursday
Contact: David Mohler 812-537-4741 dmohler@seidata.com

Buddhist Unitarian Universalist
First Unitarian Church, 1342 N. Aster St., Milwaukee WI
Meets 3rd Wednesday of every month 7:00 p.m.
Contact: Andy Agacki agacki@execpc.com (414) 771-2490

Unitarian Universalist Church of Pueblo
110 Calla Ave. Pueblo, CO 81005 (719) 561-0880
A Soto Zen Meditation group meets Sunday 7:00pm
Contact: David Cockrell (719) 546-3409
Email: cockrell@rcoop.ext.colostate.edu

Zen Meditation Group
Foothills Unitarian Church
1815 Yorktown Avenue Fort Collins, CO 80526
Friday evenings at 6:15 pm
Contact: Chris Kurth, Facilitator 970-493-5906

Northwoods Sangha
At Northwoods Unitarian Universalist Church
1370 North Millbend Drive
The Woodlands, Texas 77380
Meets: Sundays 6:00-8:00pm
Contact: Dwight Hatfield 281-298-8419

Desert Lotus Zen Group
Valley Unitarian Universalist Church
1700 W. Warner Rd Chandler, Arizona 85224
Monday evenings at 7:15pm..

Karuna Meditation Society
North Shore Unitarian Church of Vancouver, B.C.
2050 West 12th Avenue in Vancouver.
Contact: Michelle Mills (604) 874-4093
<http://www.eslvcr.fireplug.net/karuna>

Michael Servetus Unitarian Universalist Fellowship in Vancouver,
Washington.
4505 E 18th Street, Vancouver, WA 98661
1st & 3rd Mondays at 7pm.
Contacts: Marvin Benson at 360 695 1858
or Chris Faatz at 360 696 3085 <chris.faatz@powells.com>.

Monterey Peninsula Mindfulness Practice Group
Unitarian Universalist Church of the Monterey Peninsula
490 Aguajito Road Carmel, CA 93923
Wednesday mornings from 10:00-11:00 a.m.
Contact: Nancy Melton (831) 647-9155
e-mail: blossoming.nancy@mindspring.com

Name: Davis UU Buddhist Meditation & Study Group
Location: Unitarian Church of Davis,
Patwin Road, Davis CA
Church Phone: 530-753-2581
Meeting Time: Thursday 7:30-9:00pm
Contact: Dick Warg, 530-662-1669

Name: UU Meditation Circle
Location: 4190 Front Street San Diego, CA 92103
Contact: Erene Rallis 619-295-5622

UU Sangha

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Albany, New York 12206-2604

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