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In the Buddha's words

From the Dhammapada on Joy (spoken in the city of the Sakyas)

*Never feeling enmity towards those who bear us malice,
How wonderful our lives become –
Free from enemies even in the midst of the most inimical.*

*Never harming those who would hurt us,
How wonderful our lives become –
Never harmed even in the midst of harmful people.*

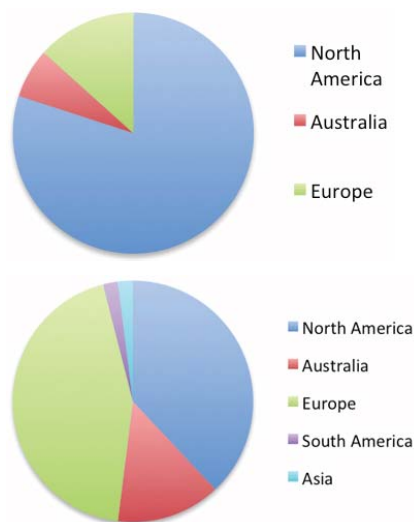
*Never feeling selfish even in the midst of selfish people,
How wonderful our lives become –
Free from possessiveness even in the midst of those who would
take everything.*

*Never possessing anything,
How wonderful our lives become –
Nourished by the same food of joy as the gods of light.*

Supporting your practice with Distance Learning

Metta Programs offers teachings to support a life that is balanced, wakeful and compassionate. These teachings are grounded in Dhamma, the practice of Insight Dialogue and the building of community.

Recognizing it is not always possible to go on retreat or practice ID with your local sangha, Metta offers distance learning through the Whole Life Program, Stepping Stone Sangha and new Relational Insight Meditation programs. These programs offer structured support with self-study of dhamma contemplations and recorded talks, which are further bolstered by online Insight Dialogue practice.



Whole Life (top) and Stepping Stone Sangha participants (bottom) come from all over the world.

Metta's Insight Dialogue teachers skillfully guide participants in facilitated dialogue throughout online sessions. The practice of Insight Dialogue in the virtual realm is new to many and admittedly offers some initial challenges for those not familiar with working in this form. Through practice, the online experience becomes easier to navigate and offers a powerful learning opportunity.

To enhance these online connections and build community, participation in retreats and

volunteer projects is encouraged. One of the greatest benefits of Metta's distance learning programs is that they connect people from all over the world, creating a global community of people dedicated to relational training.

Save the date!

The annual Whole Life Community Retreat: November 11-18, 2012 in Madison, Virginia.

In this retreat we will explore the deepest meaning of refuge, and the roles of meditation, study and community in a Whole Life Path.

This seven day Insight Dialogue retreat is designed to support participants in the Whole Life Program, Stepping Stone Sangha, and students of Insight Dialogue with prior retreat experience. At least five days of previous Insight Dialogue retreat experience is required for participants.

This retreat will be led by Gregory Kramer, Gary Steinberg and Mary Burns, and held at the Seven Oaks Retreat Center in Madison, Virginia (sevenoaksretreat.org), from November 11-18, 2012. Registration information soon to be available at metta.org.

Taking refuge only makes sense when we recognize that suffering is not just the result of a body that ages and must be fed, or of a social life that demands maintenance. There is stress in living with the basic insecurity of a changeable world and a body and brain that seek security and stability. For stress relief, the strategy usually taken is distraction in sensory and social pleasures.

What does it really mean to take refuge in meditative qualities of the mind, and how can we learn to touch these qualities in our busy, interpersonal lives? What does it mean to take refuge in a deep and sincere study of the natural laws that govern the human experience, in the Dhamma?

And, above all, what does it mean to take refuge, and find both solace and a reminder of the tough and beautiful road to a free heart, in a community dedicated to awakening? These are some of the questions that we will address in the annual Whole Life community Retreat in Virginia in 2012.

Gratitude to the Stepping Stone Sangha Team

Metta Programs launched Stepping Stone Sangha in September 2011. It has developed in shape and process thanks, in part, to the generous contributions from the following mentor teams. In gratitude, we thank:

Insight Dialogue Practice Mentors:

Anita Bermont, Susan Burgoyne, Sue Brown, Susie Clarion, Lori Ebert and Birgit Klem

Written Practice Mentors:

Sue Brown and Birgit Klem

Archivist:

Tonda March

The Stepping Stone Sangha is already off to a wonderful start, with participants from all over the world (see graphs page 2). The dedicated contributions of program leadership and mentors nurture this unique, self-paced learning opportunity, supporting the practice of relational Dhamma in everyday life. Thank you again to our SSS mentors!

A new program from Metta: Relational Insight Meditation



Relational Insight Meditation (RIM) is an experiential program for mental health professionals to explore how a relational understanding of core Buddhist teachings can support a life and a professional practice of greater freedom and ease for ourselves and clients.

In RIM we investigate together our shared human experience as we consider both western and Buddhist psychologies of the nature, causes and release of human suffering.

RIM has three goals:

- To strengthen mental health professionals' relational meditation practices
- To extend and deepen western psychotherapy by incorporating the wisdom and the wholesome practices from Buddhist psychology into our western understandings and experience.
- To offer professionals a community and a gathering that provides ongoing interaction and mutual support.

The RIM Program consists of annual RIM retreats and ongoing distance-learning programs. Each component has its own emphasis and supports the other. Mental Health professionals are welcome to attend retreats without the requirement of participating in the on-line community.

The first RIM retreat was held in Europe in October 2011. 2012 retreats include:

- Sydney, Australia in March
- Virginia, United States in April
- England in September

Check metta.org for more information.

RIM retreats weave together periods of deep personal and relational meditation with periods of contemplative inquiry into clinical practice applications.

The RIM distance learning program will deepen these inquiries as we practice together with such contemplation topics as: suffering: its causes and release, constructions of self and other, understandings of transference, countertransference and other relational difficulties, ethical boundaries, human vulnerability and difficult emotion.



All of the topics invite and practice the possibility of transforming each moment of our human and professional interactions into true awakening.

A three-part inquiry into the Path: Part 2

by Gregory Kramer

In the last newsletter I initiated a three-part teaching on the basis of our work together here. In it, I mentioned three principles, each understood as part of a whole that inclines towards a life of kindness and liberation. They are:

Every moment is the path.

*Proto-Buddhist teachings are the basis.
The entire teachings are always available.*

I speak now about the second of these: Proto-Buddhist teachings are the basis. Proto-Buddhist teachings are the Buddha's early teachings, the suttas and vinaya. They predate the development of Theravada, Mahajana or Vajrayana Buddhism.

In our post-modern world, it is not usually considered hip, or open, or even right to clearly state a commitment to a particular system of thought. After all, all systems are constructed, partial, and potentially damaging. So much knowledge is available to us now, so the thinking goes that immersion in any tradition, however wise, is unnecessarily limiting.

Is it?

I would argue otherwise. The proto-Buddhist system of thought, and importantly, the practices inherent in it, should be seen as a basic framework of understanding. From this framework, one can, with diligence, gradually come to understand the human experience in a refined, coherent, wise, and deeply compassionate way. This forms the foundation from which the wisdom of other traditions can be understood and coherently integrated into one's path. It forms a basis for the inclusion of wisdom that is driven not by dogma, but by direct experience. That is, the Dhamma and your practice take you to the edge of the tradition and deliver you, ready to learn, to the doorstep of other worldviews. Personally, I've been delivered to nature traditions, to some

benefits of the non-dual perspective, to chakra and other energetic investigations, and more recently to the gifts of the Abrahamic religions that were my cultural heritage. But I am delivered to them by experience. I approach them from the inside, and with my foundation in experience as framed by meditation and Buddhadhamma. I've experienced some of this handful of leaves, and other leaves fall into my cross-legged lap. There is no jumping from one tradition to another. It is all growing out of this lived human experience.

So how are proto-Buddhist teachings the basis?

1. The Buddhadhamma is simply an expression of natural law.
2. Learning the Dhamma is useful; it helps you locate the wisdom in present experience and adapt from habitual reaction to harmonious response.
3. There is no replacement for meditation practice and a committed life.

Dhamma is nothing other than natural law. Buddhadhamma is a system for describing this natural law and acting in harmony with it. Natural law just happens; by contrast, the Buddhadhamma is constructed. However, because it was constructed with such penetrating wisdom, the construction conforms well to our lived experience. Where it does not, we need to first be humble and allow ourselves to be challenged by our resistance; resistance usually reveals not our wisdom but our narrow preferences. If resistance continues, we need to examine our understanding of the teachings and be willing to put in the work necessary to intelligently question teachers, translations, interpretations, and sub-cultural norms.

We have to be ruthless with our own mind's tendency to seek comfort in certainty, in



systematized answers, and also willing to subject our prideful intellect to a wisdom tradition we likely do not fully understand.

Formal learning and study is a treasured adjunct to everyday experience.

The mind tends to run along the roads already built. Neural networks carry karmic momentum. Put another way, established perspectives can be strong and self-reinforcing. Letting the mind be touched by wisdom teachings challenges established viewpoints. Study is a powerful doorway for inviting these teachings into our lives. Reading, discussion, reflection can give structure to these "new" ideas. They can help us avoid the habitual reaction of the mind to squirm out of the Dhamma's penetrating challenges. Is this treasured pleasure really suffering? Am I attached to family and friends as a buffer against emptiness? Does my life truly manifest the compassion I speak of or aspire to? Is my life rooted in generosity? Community is a powerful support for this process, and formal teachings provide a basis for a community's conversations and values.

On a wise life path, we can rely only on explicit meditation practice and a life committed to discovery. Study will only take us so far. Just thinking about or intending to meditate is a good start, but we must take the step to sincere practice. And meditation is not limited to the cushion. The wisdom teachings must be intimate with us always. A life committed to understanding and release must be immersive. Otherwise, the heart will always find the escapes it needs to hold its treasured hurts intact. The mind will always find a way to protect its views if we do not remember the basis in essential teachings.

Our work together at Metta, towards a community built on values of awakening and kindness, may become, with diligence and patience, a powerful support for living into this human potential.

In the next edition of *Awaken Together, Part 3: The Entire Teachings are Always Available*

Upcoming retreats - 2012

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'Insight Dialogue and the Path of Peace'
With Mary Burns and Sharon Beckman-Brinkley

Place: Tairua, Coromandel Peninsula (North Island, New Zealand)

Dates: February 11-18, 2012

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'Open heart, true belonging: Insight Dialogue and personal relationships'
With Mary Burns and Sharon Beckman-Brinkley

Place: near Seymour, Victoria, Australia (95km from Melbourne along the Hume Hwy)

Dates: February 28 - March 6, 2012

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'Compassionate presence: Relational meditation for psychotherapists and health care professionals'
With Mary Burns and Sharon Beckman-Brinkley

Place: Wenworth Falls, Blue Mountains, west of Sydney, Australia

Dates: March 10 - 17, 2012

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'Compassionate presence: Relational meditation for psychotherapists and health care professionals'
With Sharon Beckman-Brinkley and Phyllis Hicks

Place: Hanover County, VA (USA)

Dates: April 24 - 29, 2012

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'Second Annual Cascadia Insight Dialogue retreat'
With Gregory Kramer

Place: Samish Camp, Bow, WA outside of Bellingham between Vancouver and Seattle.

Dates: May 24 - June 1, 2012