

Newsletter - Summer 2011



*Make of yourself a light,
said the Buddha, before he died.
I think of this every morning as the east begins
to tear off its many clouds of darkness,
to send up the first signal—a white fan
streaked with pink and violet, even green.
An old man, he lay down between two sala trees,
and he might have said anything,
knowing it was his final hour.”
Anon*

Thoughts from Gregory

A first offering...

In a time of change, I reflect on what will serve. Conveying news is useful; we are, in ways we know and ways we don't, a community, and news serves. And yet the news is being well attended to elsewhere. My personal perspective on Metta's development could also serve. This will come through to you whenever I speak of Metta's activities and programs; I'm a conditioned being and you will hear this in my words. You hear this now, right? Are these disembodied words just text on a screen coming out of a projected "Gregory", or can you imagine into my sitting here in a chair, the mild discomforts of a body living next to the mild joy of recognizing the vividness of awareness as I think ... type ... and think and type again; the gray of Portland's spring rain again touching the windows? Can

you recognize, through these words, this conditioned and fleshy being?

I could speak of the Dhamma, of the natural unfolding that occurs at the intersection of human awareness and the lived life. Am I not already doing that? Could I possibly *not* do that? Do I have to speak in Pali if I want to be direct in speaking Dhamma? Or might that be more indirect? Does the "Buddha" in Buddhadhamma separate us? Does it join us together in a constructed identity, one we call "Buddhist" or perhaps "relational Buddhist" or "whole life Buddhist"? For sure we are joined in the Dhamma. I can say this with confidence because, by definition, I'm speaking only of Dhamma as the natural laws of this shared human experience. We can't lose, we cannot *not* be connected in that. Were you born into a body? Does it feel? Do you live with eyes that see, ears that hear? Do the touches of light and

sound move the mind this way and that? Does the touch of someone's hand on your body move you in ways beneath what the intellect grasps? Is this tender responsiveness shared? Is this Dhamma?

Can we bring to the surface the assumption that because this is a Metta Programs newsletter, we are joined in caring about the nature of this human experience, that the Dhamma of proto-Buddhism is a powerful vehicle for just this, and that it is useful (and hopefully interesting) to engage together in this inquiry? If we bring these assumptions to the fore, we stand in shared interest; we want to awaken to experience as such. We stand together in curiosity as to the nature of the Dhamma; let's not pretend we know too much. And we stand in compassion; we've all suffered, and we're all far enough along to know that.

The teachings that draw us together are practical; they point to suffering and to the end of suffering. The attempt is not to describe the nature of reality but rather to outline the dynamics of the human experience in a discerning way, so that we know how we are to be and act in the world. The path is grounded in an inspiring yet accessible vision of human capacity. Life's pain is rooted in the elemental hungers of being born into a body-mind in an unpredictable physical and social environment. Trying to feed these hungers is stressful and most often yields self-centered patterns that remain undetected due to ignorance. The purpose of the Dhamma is to provide knowledge and practices that help us diminish the hungers to the point that the body-mind can relax – relax enough to see clearly the ever available efficacy and ease of the non-clinging mind and the naturally present and joyful power of love. The human being is understood as physically individual and biologically and psychologically relational, and the path must fully reflect these facts.

I look forward to inquiring with you and want to express my gratitude for our joining together in

a community committed to mutual support for awakening.

Program news

The Whole Life Practice Community is expanding with a new program, the **Stepping Stone Sangha**, where new members will be offered an abridged series of talks and contemplations from WL1 and WL2, to be examined in the company of a practice community, and supported by teachers and mentors. The Stepping Stone Sangha will run for three to six months, providing the foundation of Dharma and a high comfort level with the distance learning model.

The Whole Life Program, including the Stepping Stone Sangha, will be structured to support sustained practice and deep community connection at a reduced program cost. The first Stepping Stone Sangha will begin in June 2011. Please help us spread the word.

To visit the our online forum for more information, teachings and member posting please go to:
<http://www.mettaprograms.org/source/services/ipb/>
or to the Metta Programs website at:
<http://www.metta.org/>

Sangha news: From Orcas Island, Washington State, USA



Like many other ID practice groups around the world, our Orcas Island group was formed by a few individuals after attending an Insight Dialogue retreat. Out of Greg's book, the Facilitators Handbook Handbook, and a single retreat experience, the Orcas Island Insight Dialogue Practice Group was born.

The group had been practicing for awhile by the time I joined. I was immediately impressed by the mindful focus that all members brought to the biweekly gatherings, and their mutual intention to create an extraordinary space for practice. As a newcomer I was welcomed with warmth and acceptance to a serious practice that didn't feel the least bit stuffy.

We meet in a private home, in a room dedicated for ID practice, and we share the role of facilitator. Any member who is moved to facilitate may take a turn, but there is no pressure to do so. This functions well, this leadership sharing; we trust emergence as we go. It's quite extraordinary, and of course always changing, except that the group's mutual compassion, patience, respect and metta is always at work in the challenges we face in the emerging, living moment.

A website is certainly not a requirement for a practice group, but we've found our modest website to be a wonderful supporting tool for community building and maintenance. We've built in a link to Metta's website, for practical support such as facilitator resources and contemplation ideas, and because we've designed it to be interactive, it allows us to inform and exchange while greatly reducing the volume of e-mail to and from our members. There's a general Blog page for posting questions, insights and anything supporting ID practice, and a page for each ID practice gathering, where the facilitator posts information about the upcoming practice session and any one of us may reply with comments. All this supports our practice and helps build and maintain community.

We're also starting to use video Skype for members who can't physically attend. It's going really well so far. The fact is that most of us are very busy living life, so anything we can do to nurture and foster and encourage practice is helpful. Gregory is a member of our Orcas group and he drops in when he's not off island teaching around the world. This is a treat, of course, and we hope that the video Skype might help him stay involved on a personal level when his travels take him far away from his home on Orcas.

By David Selwyn,
Orcas Island, Washington

Dana (Generosity):

Dana is the practice of cultivating generosity, of giving without seeking or expecting anything in return. Performing acts of generosity has the effect of purifying and transforming the mind of the giver and reducing the acquisitive impulses that ultimately lead to suffering. It seems a good time to consider dana, since we've just finished up with WLP1 and 2. Those of us in the program have received the benefit of much time, energy and wisdom from Gregory, Gary, Mary, Phyllis, Mary and all of the others who led and supported our online sangha.

When dana is given directly to Metta Programs through PayPal or at the address below, it is tax deductible. It is possible to specify a program to which you'd like your donation to be directed. Currently, the best way to give dana to a teacher or mentor is to send them a check directly, in which case the tax deductibility depends on your profession and whether the service fits into the category of professional training (a tax accountant will know). Metta is in the process of investigating how to pass on your dana directly to a teacher or mentor through Metta.org.

When one is moved to express their gratitude

to Metta with dana, it can be accomplished through PayPal by emailing [cavoassist\[at\]cathycavanagh.com](mailto:cavoassist@cathycavanagh.com), or, if you prefer, you can send a check in US\$ directly to

Metta Programs,
P.O. Box 1915,
Friday Harbor,
WA 98250 USA.

Member contribution: Mary Rees



Nothing is as substantial as it seems. The potentiality of the next moment is totally open, conditioned by interaction with this one.

Awareness of this human life as a moving matrix of causes and conditions, internal and external, both challenges and supports recognition of any moment or any situation as an opportunity to find balance, to come to attunement with things as they are, and to live this human life as dance or music. This tuning capacity within oneself is a necessary and continually developing skill for living with integrity from a base that is both secure and fluid. The relational nature of Insight Dialogue magnifies this powerful potential from a solo practice to a symphony, a symphony through which we contribute, to the degree of clarity in our own tuning, in recognizing personal and communal conditioning or collusion and in opening to new potentialities. My faith in our capacity to do so has been enriched through our beautiful shared practice.

Gratitude and all good wishes, Mary Rees

Mary Rees has been practicing ID since 2001 and served Metta as a teacher during WLP1 and WLP2. We want to express our gratitude for her insight and service during this time, and wish her ease, joy

and continued deepening through her continuing practice.

Editor's note:

Each month we would like to feature an ID sangha from various ID communities. We also would like to feature a member contribution, about you and your practice. We invite you to let us know if you know of a group or person we could write about. Please email your ideas to: [oglesbcs \[at\] jmu.edu](mailto:oglesbcs@jmu.edu)

Upcoming events:

- **New Talk on 'Insight Dialogue and a Relational Dhamma at the NY Insight Meditation Center**
June 7 with Gregory Kramer
- **'Insight Dialogue and the Power and Challenge of Meditating Together'**
In London, England September 24-25 with Gregory Kramer
- **'Insight Dialogue: the Four Noble Truths Come Home'**
In South Devon, England September 28 to October 4 with Gregory Kramer
- **'Compassionate Presence: Relational Meditation for Psychotherapists and Health Care Professionals'**
In Arbogast, Austria, October 16-23 with Gregory Kramer, Sharon Beckman-Brindley and Phyllis Hicks
- **9-days on 'Zeal and Relinquishment: An Insight Dialogue Retreat**
In Barre, Massachusetts November 4-13 with Gregory Kramer