



THE LOTUS BUD

Newsletter of the Lotus Buds Sangha ~ Issue No 5, December 2007

Eating together



Eating a meal together can be a meditative practice.

When we serve our food we can already begin practicing. Serving ourselves, we realize that many elements, such as the rain, sunshine, earth, air and love, have all come together to form this wonderful meal. In fact, through this food we see that the entire universe is supporting our existence.

On retreats or days of mindfulness we are aware of the whole sangha as we serve ourselves and we should take an amount of food that is good for us. Before eating, the bell is invited three times and we can enjoy breathing in and out while practicing the five contemplations.

We should take our time as we eat, chewing each mouthful at least 30 times, until the food becomes liquefied. This aids the digestive process. Let us enjoy every morsel of our food and the presence of the dharma brothers and sisters around us. Let us eat in such a way that solidity,

Five contemplations

- 1. This food is a gift of the whole universe, the earth, the sky and much mindful work.*
- 2. May we eat in mindfulness so as to be worthy of it.*
- 3. May we transform our unskillful states of mind and learn to eat in moderation.*
- 4. May we take only foods that nourish us and prevent illness.*
- 5. May we accept this food to realize the path of understanding and love.*

joy and peace be possible during the time of eating.

Eating in silence, the food becomes real with our mindfulness and we are aware of its nourishment. In order to deepen our practice of mindful eating and support the peaceful atmosphere, we stay seated. After twenty minutes of silent eating, two sounds of the bell will be invited. We may then start a mindful conversation with our friend or begin to get up from the table.

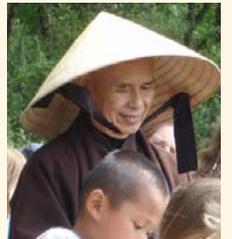
We take a few moments to notice that we have finished and our hunger is satisfied. We realize how fortunate we are to have had this nourishing food to eat to help us on the path of love and understanding.

WHO WE ARE

The Lotus Buds Sangha is a community inspired by the Buddhist teachings of Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh (pictured below).

We aspire to live fully in each moment for the peace and happiness of ourselves and all beings. We meet regularly to observe the art of mindful living and to foster a supportive community of practitioners.

**We meet at 7:30 pm
each Wednesday at:
Buddhist Library,
Church St,
Camperdown,
Sydney.**



www.lotusbudsangha.org

Graham and Svein

My friend Graham passed away in April this year. During his last months we came to share moments of sadness, laughter and silence. Yet it was the underlying calm acceptance of his illness that touched and stayed with me the most. There were times Graham would 'go back to his breathing' to embrace the strong emotion that would come up like a storm and overwhelm him without warning. In a moment he could be reduced to uncontrolled sobbing - a symptom of his brain disease. Yet he had trained himself to focus on his breathing at these times and would regain composure within a minute or so.

As his health deteriorated, Graham was able to mostly maintain a positive outlook and an irreverent, dry sense of humour. By January he was in a wheelchair and although his speech was becoming slurred and more difficult to understand he managed to plan and conduct an evening of mindfulness at his home with the support of his family. It brought him great joy.

All these months Graham would talk animatedly of his deep wish to go to Plum Village. However clear it had become that this would not be possible, we never spoke of it not happening. In those periods of silence he seemed sustained by the thought of it. One morning I shared with him about when Thay invited us to stand on the deck of his hut in Upper Hamlet during a winter retreat. This is part of what I later wrote down for him.

"We stood in the pre-dawn silence as the mist from our breathing mingled with the cold air. The pale sun rose through the clearing fog and I noticed the light reflected in a dewdrop on the branch next to me. The weak rays sent shards of light and colour through the little dewdrop. There were perhaps forty of us on the deck but my attention was only with the dewdrop, reflecting the scene before me. When I moved my head slightly, the colours and light in the dewdrop changed like a kaleidoscope."



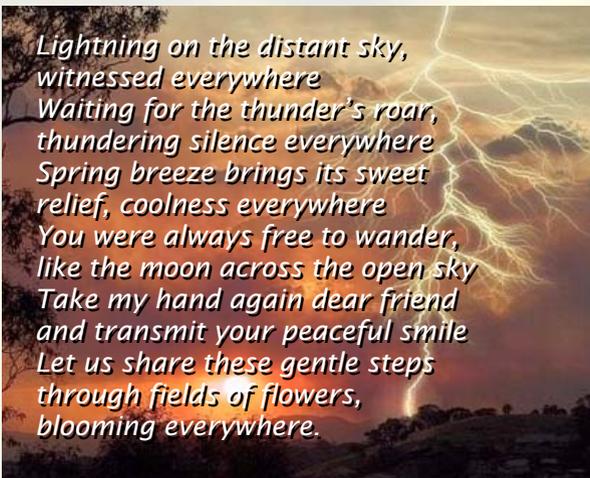
The sunrise, the hills and clouds were all reflected in the tiny drop of water. It may have been as little as fifteen minutes together with the dewdrop yet each time I think of it I am taken back to the quiet stillness of that morning. I don't know how long the dewdrop lasted on the branch - what is of the nature to be born in the morning must die by evening - and yet the dewdrop has also never left."

In April at the end of the third segment of Thay's trip in Ha Noi we heard the news

that Svein Myreg, a wonderful dharma teacher and friend, had passed away.

Earlier that afternoon we were on the islet on Hoan Kiem Lake and Thay explained the significance of two Chinese characters written there, full moon (freedom) and spring breeze (dharma). Later that evening a few of the lay delegation who had known Svein sat in meditation on the rooftop of our hotel and we later shared our memories of him.

From where we sat I could see a spectacular display of lightning but the storm was too far away to hear any thunder. That night I wrote a poem.



It was the 18th April 2007. As I later found out, the same day that Graham had passed away.

John Barclay

Sharing dharma rain

Sitting peacefully in meditation, the spaciousness of mind becomes the soothing sound of rooftop and rain. The belly rises and falls with the movements of breath. I am a cloud-topped mountain, solid and free. The rain is inside and out. It's a wonderful way to begin another Wednesday night with my brothers and sisters of the Lotus Buds Sangha. So often the power of Zen is revealed in silence: words are simply 'pointing at the moon'. But there are also times when words are valuable tools. They enable us to receive the gentle sound of a Dharma teaching or share our thoughts and feelings with each other.

Cultivating the Mind of Love

We have been sitting in the mellow Dharma rain of Thich Nhat Hanh's book *Cultivating the Mind of Love*, learning from him the Mahayana way of looking deeply:

"Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha are three precious jewels in Buddhism, and the most important of these is Sangha. The Sangha contains the Buddha and the Dharma. A good teacher is important, but sisters and brothers in the practice are the main ingredients of success." (page 71)

It is through sharing rather than through isolation Thay tells us that the flower of love blooms. Putting ourselves in touch with a solid supportive community who practice mindfulness together supports our transformation.

Principles and practices of sharing

Over two recent evenings the 'Wednesday group' has explored the reasons why we want to share within the Sangha, the principles that might guide our sharing and the ground rules that enable sharing to take place. In small discussion groups we enthusiastically shared our thoughts and feelings then pooled our ideas (table below).

Sharing we said supports us on the path of mindfulness, love and compassion but it requires mutual respect and trust in order to flourish. This is enabled by our taking turns in speaking and respecting the principle of confidentiality. For example, our tradition conducts discussions by asking Sangha members to put their palms together and offer each other a Lotus to indicate that we want to speak. When we have the floor we know others are listening deeply to us.

Joyfully Together

The act of sharing together is a group learning process. It generates the feelings of connection and trust that lays the foundations for growing collectively.

In doing so we are strengthening the foundations of the Sangha. Indeed, our sharing points us in the direction of Thay's teachings: love, compassion, openness, generosity and mindfulness are all values and practices we are encouraged to develop as individuals and within the Sangha.

Of course sharing takes many forms. While we may share in a discussion we might also offer compassion to a friend in the Sangha or perhaps contribute to *The Lotus Bud*. In his book *Joyfully Together*, Thay offers us a suite of practices for living in harmony that we might explore another day. One theme that emerged from our discussions was that we would all welcome more opportunities to share together.

Chris Barker

The reasons we gave for wanting to share	The principles that we said might guide sharing	The practical ground rules that we said might enable sharing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To learn and gain insight To support the practice To explore different views To belong / cement the Sangha To practice love and compassion, giving and receiving To be heard 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To listen to others To participate To be open To be generous To offer respect To be genuine and honest To practice mindfulness To develop trust and safety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To take turns To not interrupt others To allow equal time to all To use readings/writings as focal points To make sure we all understand the ground rules To have a facilitator To respect confidentiality

Our main activities

www.lotusbudsangha.org

Mindfulness Meditation Class

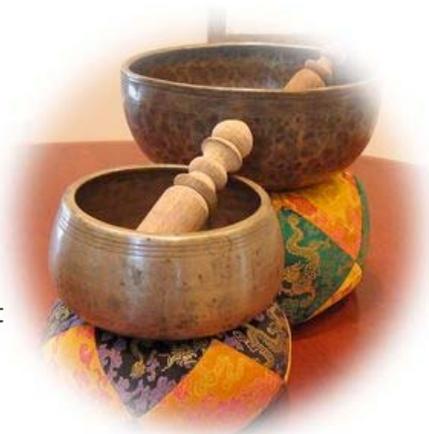
Every Wednesday night of the week we welcome all to come join us for a dharma talk and meditation practice at the Buddhist Library.

Mindfulness Days - monthly

Once a month we offer a day of mindful practice and contemplation. The day normally consists of chanting sitting meditation, outdoor walking meditation (if weather permits), a dharma talk and lunch.

Mindfulness Trainings Recitation Days - second monthly

As well as integrating meditation and Mindful Living in our days, our dedicated members take on further commitments and vows by upholding the 5 Mindfulness Trainings and/or the 14 Mindfulness Trainings.



What's on in DECEMBER

Sunday Dec 9th
Picnic in Centennial Park
12 noon. Preceded by Mindfulness Training
Recitation at the Buddhist Library (9am)
Come either or both!

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Wednesday Dec 12th
5 Mindfulness Training Transmission
at Buddhist Library at 7.30pm.
Please come to support the new aspirants -
this is the first transmission
on a Wednesday night.

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Sunday Dec 16th
Half Day of Mindfulness
at Hurlstone Park 9.30am start
to 1.30am finish (shared veg lunch)



How to contribute to *The Lotus Bud*

If you have something you would like to contribute to *The Lotus Bud* please offer it to Chris Barker in the following ways:

- In person at the Wednesday night group
- By e-mail to: cbarker@uow.edu.au
- By post to: Chris Barker, Faculty of Arts, University of Wollongong, NSW 2500

Please write an account of your practice, a poem, pass on news or anything else that inspires you. Contributions can be short or long but need to be under 600 words.