



CLEAR MIND

The Newsletter of Madison Vipassana, Inc. ❖ March 2017

Residential Meditation Retreat with Ayya Medhanandi May 21-24, 2017

We are thrilled to welcome Ayya Medhanandi to lead a residential retreat for the Madison Vipassana community May 21–24, 2017.

Ayya Medhanandi is the founder and guiding teacher of Sati Saraniya Hermitage, a forest monastery for women in the Theravada tradition located in Perth, Ontario. The daughter of Eastern European refugees who emigrated to Montreal after World War II, Ayya began a spiritual quest in childhood that led her to India, Burma, England, New Zealand, Malaysia, Taiwan, and finally back to Canada.

In 1988, at the Yangon Mahasi retreat center in Burma, Ayya requested full ordination as a bhikkhuni (fully ordained nun) from her teacher, the Venerable Sayadaw U Pandita. This was not yet possible for Theravada Buddhist women. Instead, Sayadaw granted her 10-precept novice vows on condition that she take them for life. Thus began Ayya's monastic training in

the Burmese tradition.

When Burma was closed to foreigners by a military coup, Sayadaw blessed her to join the Ajahn Chah Thai Forest Sangha at Amaravati Buddhist Monastery in the UK. After 10 years in their siladhara community, Ayya felt called to more seclusion and solitude in New Zealand and Southeast Asia.



In 2007, after having lived as an alms mendicant nun for nearly 20 years, Ayya received bhikkhuni ordination at Ling Quan Chan Monastery in Keelung, Taiwan. In 2008, on invitation from the Ottawa Buddhist Society and Toronto Theravada Buddhist Community, Ayya returned to her native Canada to establish Sati Saraniya Hermitage.

During the May 21–24 retreat, we will create a renunciate environment by following the Eight Precepts (see [page 7](#)) and reflecting on every activity as part of practice. The retreat will be held in noble silence

and offer morning and evening chanting, sitting and walking meditation, daily instructions, and Dhamma talks. The morning and evening chanting will include the lighting of candles and incense. There will be a morning and a midday vegetarian meal each day; we will refrain from taking food other than clear liquids after the midday meal.

In keeping with Theravada tradition, this retreat is being offered on a *dana* (freewill donation) basis. There will be an opportunity to offer *dana* at the end of the retreat. Your generosity supports Ayya Medhanandi, the Sati Saraniya Hermitage, and the ability of Madison Vipassana to offer retreats. The bare costs for this retreat (use of the facility, including sleeping rooms; meals; supplies; and teacher transportation, room, and meals) are \$300 per person for a double room and \$442 for a single. These costs do not include any payment to Ayya for her teachings and time.

You can read more about the ancient and beautiful tradition of *dana* [here](#). In addition, these two articles by Thanissaro Bhikkhu may be of interest:

- [The Economy of Gifts](#)
- [No Strings Attached](#)

The retreat will be held at the [Pine Lake Retreat Center](#) in Westfield, Wisconsin. Situated on beautiful Pine Lake, the center is surrounded by rolling hills, farms, and oak savannas. The 400-acre

There are those who discover
they can completely abandon
confused reactions
and become patient as the earth;
unmoved by anger,
unshaken as a pillar,
unperturbed as a clear and quiet
pool.

— Dhammapada 95. From [A Dhammapada for Contemplation](#) by Ajahn Munindo.

property offers a number of lovely walking trails.

Early registration is encouraged to ensure a spot at the retreat. To register, complete [the registration form at the back of this newsletter](#) and mail it with a \$100 deposit. The deposit is required to hold your place; it can be refunded upon request (except to those canceling after April 24, 2017), or it can be

included as part of your offered dana. If the retreat is full, you will be placed on a waiting list. We will hold a number of spaces open until two weeks before the retreat begins to facilitate attendance by young adults (18–26) and people of color.

You can sample Ayya Medhanandi's teachings on the [Sati Saraniya website](#) and at [Dharmaseed.org](#). See below for an interview with Ayya Medhanandi. ❖



Pine Lake

Interview with Ayya Medhanandi

Editor's note. This interview was conducted in 2013 by Jayanta Shirley Johannesen, a lay minister in the Community of Abhayagiri Lay Ministers at Abhayagiri Buddhist Monastery, California. The interview is longer than usual for this newsletter but offers a superb introduction to Ayya Medhanandi and the revival of the bhikkhuni order. Photos are from the [Sati Saraniya Hermitage website](#).

Jayanta: Ayya, I first met you when I visited Amaravati Buddhist Monastery in England back in the 1990's when you were a siladhara, one of the 10-precept nuns in the Thai Forest Sangha. Since then, we have seen dramatic changes for nuns internationally, and for you personally. When we met, there were no Theravada ordination procedures for nuns or monasteries where fully ordained women (bhikkhunis) could train. Bhikkhuni ordinations now take place regularly, and there are bhikkhuni monasteries in many countries. As the founder and senior bhikkhuni of the first training monastery for Theravada women in Canada, you are at the forefront of this modern-day revival. How did this happen?

Ayya Medhanandi: We are truly on the cusp of a wonderful new era. I see the changes as historical for both Theravada Buddhist monasticism and the outreach of the Buddha's teachings in western society. The Buddha said that when a person native to the country in which the Dhamma teachings are introduced

becomes a monastic, then the Dhamma will truly begin to take root there. That is now happening around the world, including here in Canada. So compared to how things were 25 years ago when I first ordained, the Theravada monastic landscape for women is remarkably transformed.

As you know, the bhikkhuni order in Theravada Buddhism disappeared in Sri Lanka during the 10th century. In the absence of other bhikkhunis, the required dual ordination from both monks (bhikkhus) and nuns could not be carried out and, as a result, a culture of omission

developed over the centuries. In the past few decades, women have begun seeking higher ordination from the prevailing conservative patriarchy. When the Thai Forest Sangha under Ajahn Chah came to the west in the late 70's, four western women requested Ajahn Sumedho to train them with the 10 precepts, the equivalent of novice nun or samaneri ordination. This he agreed to do, with Ajahn Chah's blessing.

This led to the creation of a new order of nuns in the western branch monasteries called siladhara: women upholding virtue. The siladhara form

was intended to meet their aspiration for higher monastic training. At the same time, it created a greater sense of parity with the bhikkhus. It was not bhikkhuni ordination per se, which still is not recognized in Thailand (although a handful of flourishing Thai bhikkhuni monasteries now exist), but it was a radical and compassionate step.

J: Did you ever think about taking full ordination when you were a siladhara?



AM: I thought of it well before I joined the siladhara community. In 1988, while on retreat at the Mahasi Meditation Centre in Rangoon, Burma, I was ordained by Sayadaw U Pandita as a 10-precept nun. Most of the nuns in his monastery were tilashin, keeping eight precepts. I was eager to try out being a nun but I was drawn to a greater level of renunciation. There were no women bhikkhus to be seen (I did not yet know that the female monastic form had a special name), so I asked for the Going Forth ordination as a 10-precept nun. Sayadaw would not agree unless I took lifetime vows. “You’ve had enough of samsara” (the realms of cyclic existence), he counselled, and sent me back to my meditation cell to ponder this. After three weeks, he asked if I had decided. Filled with profound trust, I could answer only “Yes.”

It was a year of major unrest in Burma that culminated in a military coup. There were violent scenes not far from the monastery gates and all foreigners were advised to leave the country. Hoping to find a peaceful situation for practice and training, and to be closer to my aging parents, I decided to return to the west. I stayed at the Insight Meditation Society (IMS) in Massachusetts and a few small monks’ monasteries in California. That is when I began to learn about the female arahants that existed during the Buddha’s time. I wondered what had happened to the bhikkhuni lineage of our tradition, having never come across a bhikkhuni. Twice during those early years, I innocently asked to take higher ordination but it was not possible.

J: Please tell us about those two times. What did you experience?

AM: The first time was in 1989. Sayadaw U Pandita came from Burma to teach a two-month retreat at IMS while I was practising there. Three American women on the retreat took temporary ordination. When the retreat ended, they offered me requisites and encouraged me to request bhikkhuni ordination from Sayadaw. I was hesitant at first because of my experience in Burma. Then it occurred to me that Sayadaw was my preceptor and Dhamma father; surely, he would have compassion for me! And as a highly respected Theravada elder, he might have enough influence to support my request. Plucking up my courage, I went to see him, bowed and asked if he could make me a bhikkhuni. He looked at me stone-faced and said, “I can’t make you a bhikkhuni, but I can make you a bhikkhu.”



This was not the answer I expected, yet it did not seem like a rebuff or a form of disparagement, but rather, a goad. I knew that the word, bhikkhu, meant one who is worthy of the robe, far from the defilements and dangers of samsara. Sayadaw seemed to be pointing me to a loftier goal than the convention of ordination itself, which he was not in a position to offer me.

His words reignited my wish for enlightenment. Again, reflecting on the 10 precepts I held, and the rare opportunity to live a life of purity

with the Dhamma, I was able to nurture gratitude in my heart for my good karma. However, when I shared this response with the three laywomen, they spoke critically of the inequality of women in the Theravada tradition. Upon reflection, I surmised that Sayadaw may have been reluctant to promote bhikkhuni ordination in order to avoid a schism in the Burmese Sangha that could endanger the transmission of the Buddha’s teachings worldwide.

A few months later, I was invited to spend time on personal retreat at the Taungpulu Kaba-Aye Monastery in California. The elderly abbot, Hlaing Thé Sayadaw, a revered meditation master, was exceedingly kind to me. He offered me teachings and provided my daily requisites. One day, an invitation came for me to take part in a bhikkhuni ordination in Los Angeles. When I requested Sayadaw’s permission to go, he blithely echoed what I had been told before; there was no such thing as a bhikkhuni. Then, in his tender mentoring way, he exhorted me to continue my meditation practice.

The other monks there ridiculed the idea that such a ceremony was taking place. I don’t believe their intentions were malicious; they had simply been brought up in a homogeneous monastic culture in which the bhikkhuni lineage had been defunct for more than 1000 years.

J: How did their attitude affect you?

AM: I felt somewhat buffeted but held to my faith in the Buddha’s priceless teaching that promised full awakening for all. I also valued obedience as a vital aspect of my training, and wanted to refrain from doing anything that defied or showed disrespect for my elders and teachers. I decided it would be better

to wait for my karma to ripen and conditions to unfold naturally, so I abandoned the prospect of becoming a bhikkhuni.

I gained the strength to do this from the great loving-kindness of both Sayadaws, and especially by heeding Sayadaw U Pandita's advice to contemplate Dhamma and ultimate reality rather than getting upset, or hoping to gain rights through worldly conventions. I loved being a nun: wearing the robe, living the renunciate life of morality and simplicity, and being given the chance to practise in silence and investigate the state of my heart. These elder monks were brilliant meditation masters and guides.

Reflecting in this way, rather than being disappointed, I felt a deep sense of gratitude for my good fortune to receive teachings from them. All other issues fell quickly away. Also, being a young, untrained and solitary nun, I had to concentrate on practicalities; where would I find support, shelter, and a community with suitable conditions to practice in the 10-precept form I had been given.

Naturally, the longer I was in robes, I continued to question why the original system of training offered to men was accepted while the parallel system of training offered to women by the Buddha himself was not honoured. This became more apparent during my 10 years in the large community at Amaravati where monks and nuns practised side-by-side. The Buddha had established the complete Fourfold Assembly or Ubhato Sangha of bhikkhus, bhikkhunis, upasakas and upasikas (monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen). Why would the all-knowing Blessed One

create the Bhikkhuni Vinaya, or code of discipline, 2595 years ago, if it was not of value to us?

J: Can you say more about how you and the other nuns felt during your years at Amaravati?

AM: As earnest and committed Dhamma practitioners, we appreciated our unique position. While we were aware that the Theravada bhikkhuni ordination and training had not been practised in modern times, I don't think any of us imagined that we would not be able to pursue this path if we wished. We understood that the siladhara form in and of itself was already quite a radical achievement and that, perhaps one day, we would take the next step and become the first candidates for higher ordination.

For the time being we practised great contentment, knowing that we did receive excellent training: the 10 precepts and more than 130 rules and observances culled from both the Bhikkhuni and Bhikkhu Vinayas established by the Buddha. Effectively, our life simulated that of a bhikkhuni as much as any other Buddhist monastic training available for women in the western world. We also had the collective support and friendship of like-minded spiritual

companions, wonderful guides, teachers, and all the requisites and conditions needed for practice.

However, I continued to feel a quiet aspiration for, and strong kinship with, the ancient bhikkhuni lineage. In my mind, aspiring for greater renunciation did not preclude having gratitude. Indeed, in the Theravada monastic world of that time, Amaravati was the only place where Theravadan women could live as renunciates. What more did we need? There were both monks and nuns at that time who believed that the bhikkhuni rules were impractical and could not be properly kept in modern times. Ironically, there was no doubt about the practicality or viability of the monks' Vinaya.

J: What happened when you left the community to practise on your own?

AM: As time went on, it became more and more difficult for me to ignore the glaring disparity between male and female monastic training, especially when I stepped outside the siladhara world. I began to wonder how I could press beyond this boundary that circumscribed the monastic journey for myself, for my sisters in the robe, and for future generations of women drawn to Theravada Buddhist monasticism.



I reflected often on the Buddha's stepmother and first bhikkhuni, Mahapajapati Gotami, shaving her head and requesting ordination three times from the Buddha. When asked if women were capable of becoming enlightened, the Buddha confirmed that women were as capable of it as men. This was the premise for his consenting to Mahapajapati's ordination, thus establishing the Bhikkhuni Order.

I took these contemplations with me on a year's sabbatical from Amaravati in 1999 when I travelled to New Zealand for solitary retreat. I couldn't find just one place to retreat for that length of time and had to move quite often, staying briefly in a meditation hut in the bhikkhu monastery in Stokes Valley, house-sitting for lay supporters on vacation, and secluded in a riverside cabin in a Cistercian monastery where the monks cooked and filled my bowl daily with joy and kindness. At the end of the retreat, I was invited to stay on in New Zealand. It seemed a good opportunity to test my wings as a solitary nun and to benefit from conditions conducive to contemplative practice.

Soon, however, I felt the challenge of being the lone holder of the modern siladhara form far from its only enclave in the world, England, where it had been created. I was especially discomfited on occasions when I came into contact with fully ordained Mahayana bhikshunis and was touched by their connection to an ancient lineage, networks of spiritual companions, and unflinching community support.

J: Was this your first time meeting bhikkhunis? And what impact did this have on you?

AM: In the early years, Mahayana bhikshunis occasionally visited the siladhara community including a few westerners who had ordained under Master Hua in California or with other teachers in Taiwan and Korea. In New Zealand, I also came to know a group of Taiwanese bhikshunis and visited their thriving community in Auckland. Their master, an impressive, confident and compassionate leader, chanted special blessings for my well-being.

In addition to feeling isolated from my siladhara community, I often experienced insecurity in terms of my daily requisites. Testing as they were, these conditions actually

strengthened my resolve and my refuge in Dhamma. Having nothing and no one to turn to but myself and my practice demanded more intensive inner searching and purification. My meetings with Mahayana bhikkhunis made me keenly aware of the gap in female leadership in our own tradition. I felt a growing call to pave a new path, which would mean uncovering an old one.

J: Did that mean finding a way towards full ordination?

AM: Although I felt called to a larger work, I didn't know exactly what that would entail. Yet the wish for higher ordination still percolated in me. In 2006, I moved from New Zealand to Penang where I continued to meet Mahayana bhikshunis and learned about a monastic training program in Taiwan that was open to foreigners. That fired my enthusiasm, but I knew that I would need a mentor to introduce me to that Sangha and sponsor my candidacy.



Then, in 2007, a great ripening of karma took place. I met a remarkable and highly revered Chinese monk, Master Chi Chuan, the abbot of Triple Wisdom Temple. He leads a community of bhikshus and bhikshunis in the Dharmagupta lineage, which dates back to the 5th-

century Sri Lankan Theravada Sangha. Having spent a year in Burma, he knew a lot about the Theravada tradition. Master Chi Chuan was curious why I wanted to take bhikkhuni ordination, having been a Theravada nun for 19 years. After thoroughly questioning me, he was satisfied with my resolve and sincerity, and after a period of several months, he offered to sponsor me.

J: After waiting for so many years, what was it like for you when you finally received bhikkhuni ordination?

AM: As you can imagine, after years and years of training in one tradition, it was quite daunting. With the help of compassionate translators, I had regular practice sessions for months in Penang and then persevered through four weeks of intensive training in Taiwan. I was the only westerner in a group of over 200 candidates. The final ceremony took place in a 100-year-old monastery in Keelung. After reciting my vows and hearing the chants of 21 elder bhikshus and bhikshunis who conferred the higher ordination on me, I experienced an indescribable joy and uplift, as if Mahapajapati Gotami Theri herself had transmitted the lineage directly into my heart.

I was overcome by a vast stillness and a powerful sense of gratitude and awe. The other nuns were astonished at my tears of joy. They, too, were very happy to receive bhikshuni ordination but for them the process was so normal, so available. They couldn't comprehend the hurdles I had to surmount to take part in the ordination process with them.

Suddenly, I also experienced what it was like to have elders—the direct connection with two and a half millennia of ancestral spiritual mothers. I was aware of them within and around me, like a force of

universal loving-kindness and compassion, silently witnessing my steps up to the altar. This, I realized, was the ancient lineage to which all female monastics of our tradition should have access.

J: After the ordination, did you have any idea where you would go or what would unfold?

AM: I had been invited back to Canada to teach but didn't know how to present myself. I even contemplated not telling anyone about my bhikkhuni ordination. This was a major dilemma for me. I finally confided in Ajahn Viradhammo, a kind Dhamma teacher and trusted friend for many years at Amaravati and in New Zealand who is now abbot of Tisarana monastery, near Ottawa. "You can't be a closet bhikkhuni!" he said. "You have to come out of the closet."

It was ironic. Finally, I had received the mantle of full ordination. However, in taking that step, I could no longer remain a member of the Amaravati community. This change heralded another growth spurt. During my teaching trip to Canada, Ajahn Viradhammo suggested I stay on for good. As I am Canadian-born, that felt right. I wasn't sure what would evolve from that decision but I felt a strong connection to the Buddhist communities in Ottawa and Toronto, and had complete faith that I would be well-cared for and supported. A group of women in Ontario gathered around me to form a committee, and we applied for charitable status to establish Sati Saraniya Hermitage. It was granted in September 2007.

J: So you have arrived in Canada, a registered organization has been established to support you and then what happens?

AM: Originally, the objectives of the Hermitage were focussed on

teaching meditation and serving in the community. Then Ayya Nimmala, who was still a laywoman, asked if I would train her. We had met the year before at Tisarana monastery where she had served as a valued steward for more than a year. I could not refuse such a worthy candidate.



Our connection was pivotal in cultivating the seed from which Sati Saraniya has evolved into a training monastery for women during these last four-and-a-half extraordinary years. In fact, Ayya Nimmala's ease of ordination was the fruit of years of struggle experienced by many of us who came before, including two former siladharas, Ayyas Anandabodhi and Santacitta, with whom she was ordained.

Effectively, the Theravada Bhikkhuni lineage has now been restored and women need no longer be excluded from living the holy life as the Buddha first envisioned it. We now have a clear way of training, transmitted from the Buddha himself down through a long line of arahant bhikkhuni elders—our ancestral mothers and mentors in the robe—who inspire and guide us. We have a growing international retinue of contemporary female sangha role models, a supportive lay community and the conditions to keep going.

The road behind us has been tough, but that is the karma of

pioneers, whether men or women. These spiritual tests help us to see the mind, to know the Four Noble Truths in life itself, and to steer ourselves towards liberation from suffering. By training ourselves to uphold the Dhamma, the Dhamma upholds us. That's been my experience. If I try to direct myself toward compassion rather than conflict, regardless of how I am treated, I can respond with respect and kindness. This is the heart of every true spiritual lineage.

J: What hurdles remain for you in establishing a training centre for bhikkhunis in Canada?

AM: My intentions originally seemed simple and straightforward. I came back to Canada to deepen my own practice and to share the teachings. Now that has expanded and includes helping to pave the way so that other women can pursue their spiritual aspirations and practise as Theravada bhikkhunis. However, no sooner did Sati Saraniya Hermitage appear on the monastic map than we found ourselves unwittingly involved in political controversy—highly-charged opinions about the first bhikkhuni ordinations in Australia, including objections to their validity from senior bhikkhus of the Thai Forest Sangha.

Fortunately, the remoteness of our community keeps the fray and polemic of public and ecclesiastical opinion at some distance. It is also dying down as the years pass, allowing us to devote ourselves more to the teachings and to grow in Dhamma, rather than in worldly ways. That can be a true gift to offer when people come to us upset by traditional opinions and controversy.

While carrying this enormous responsibility, I recognize that I am aging and less physically able to exert myself. Despite these

limitations, I am gladdened by the rare privilege and opportunity to serve in this way, so I keep pushing the envelope. There is a lot of uncertainty, much physical work, and few hands on deck in a new monastery. It is a challenge to balance the outer activity—maintaining infrastructure, communications, accounts, teaching commitments, constructing a website and building a temple—with finding time for seclusion.

Intuitively, I know that this is the practice—working with conditions however difficult they may seem. The learning curve as a senior monastic is breathtaking. Ajahn Chah’s reflections about this process in his own years as abbot have been a great boon for me. I am in a unique position on the frontline. I would not even call it the forefront, but an inner front, a frontier new, exalted and priceless. I have this high-voltage highway for insight into

my own insecurities and weaknesses within the barbs of my own and others’ ignorance as they arise in the hot pot of community. When great spiritual tests face us, we have to grow taller.

J: What do you feel is the importance of the availability of bhikkhuni training?

AM: As I mentioned earlier, the Buddha intended the Sangha to be fourfold. I believe his wisdom in this, as in all his teachings, lies in achieving balance. We integrate the many threads of our humanity as we cultivate the spiritual path. Both men and women benefit from this full expression of Sangha, as we see with guests who visit the hermitage. In our bhikkhuni life, we undertake an important role as spiritual teachers and sisters. Part of our renunciation and purification is being willing to endure some discomfort. We remind and encourage ourselves that this work is

for the benefit of women and men of all ages, for generations to come.

Though we live in a culture that may not understand or appreciate why or what we are doing, we know the power and breadth of these teachings. What is precious is often hard to do, and that is exactly why we need great fortitude, wisdom, patience and compassion. We need to work and move forward with respect and dignity. Though our responsibility is great, so will be the blessing of realizing our highest potential as human beings. In this spirit, we keep walking with deep dedication and gratitude. ❖

— “Pioneering and the Dhamma of Perseverance: Jayanta Shirley Johannesen interviews Ayya Medhanandi, founder of Sati Saraniya Hermitage in Canada” (Alliance for Bhikkhunis, 9/4/13). Reprinted with permission.

The Eight Precepts

Practitioners are asked to abide by these precepts throughout the retreat with Ayya Medhanandi.

1. **Non-harming:** Not intentionally killing or harming any living creature.
2. **Non-stealing:** Not taking that which is not freely given.
3. **Refraining from false speech:** Speaking only what is true and useful, speaking wisely, responsibly, and appropriately. In the retreat context, this means keeping noble silence.
4. **Refraining from sexual activity:** Refraining from all sexual activity.
5. **Refraining from the use of intoxicants and drugs that lead to carelessness:** Abstaining from the use of alcohol or other drugs that are not medically necessary.
6. **Refraining from eating at the wrong times.** Not eating from noon until dawn the next day.
7. **Refraining from entertainment, beautification, and adornment.** Not indulging in entertainment, or adorning the body with jewelry, makeup, or other things that draw the attention of others or distract from turning inward.
8. **Refraining from lying on a high or luxurious sleeping place.** Not overly indulging in sleep or using sleep as a means of distraction.

MIMG Sitting Groups

Madison Insight Meditation Group offers three weekly meditation opportunities, one in central Madison, one on the west side, and one on the east side. Bring your own meditation cushion or bench if you have one. Chairs and some extra cushions are available. Details are below.



Central: Sundays 6:00–8:00 p.m.

First Unitarian Society, 900 University Bay Drive, Madison

1st & 3rd Sundays: 45-minute sitting followed by talk and discussion

2nd, 4th, & 5th Sundays: 45-minute sitting, 20-minute walking meditation, 45-minute sitting (breakout group on 2nd Sundays offers introduction to insight meditation—see below)

This sitting group is peer-led.

West: Tuesdays 6:30–8:15 p.m.

9638 Shadow Ridge Trail, Middleton (directions on [website](#))

45-minute sitting followed by Dhamma talk/discussion

This sitting group is led by Janice Cittasubha Sheppard, who was trained at Abhayagiri Buddhist Monastery as a Buddhist Lay Minister, and at Spirit Rock Meditation Center as a Community Dharma Leader.

East: Fridays 7:30–9:00 p.m.

Main Street Yoga, 1882 E. Main Street, Madison

30-minute sitting followed by 10-minute movement meditation and Dhamma discussion or talk

This sitting group is led by Devon Hase, Craig Hase, and Jack Arpin. Devon completed the Community Dharma Leader training at Spirit Rock Meditation Center. Craig has been studying in the American vipassana tradition for a number of years. Jack ordained and lived in a Thai Forest monastery.

Introduction to Insight Meditation

Madison Insight Meditation Group offers an introduction to meditation the second Sunday of each month from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. Those who come for the introduction have time together with a leader, in a separate room, to introduce themselves, learn some of the fundamentals of sitting and walking meditation, and hear a bit about our group and its history.



These monthly introductory sessions are open to everyone. If you have not meditated before, we invite you to attend one of them. Everyone is also welcome to attend any of our three sitting groups (see above). We hope you'll join us! ❖

Kalyana Mitta Groups

A *Kalyana Mitta* (*spiritual friend* in Pali) is a group of 8–12 individuals who gather periodically to study and discuss the teachings of the Buddha and his path of practice. Each group determines how frequently to meet, what to read, and how to structure the sessions. Madison Insight Meditation Group gathers the names of those interested, and when there are enough people for a new group, they are notified and assisted in getting the group started. Once established, each Kalyana Mitta manages on its own.

If you're interested in joining a Kalyana Mitta, email Jan Sheppard at janice.sheppard@yahoo.com. ❖

Four-Week Introduction to Meditation Class

Training the Mind: Introduction to Meditation
Taught by Janice Cittasubha Sheppard
 April 15, 22, 29, and May 6, 3:30–5:30 p.m.
 9638 Shadow Ridge Trail, Middleton, WI

This four-week class will introduce the basic principles of breath-based meditation as outlined by Gotama Buddha 2,560 years ago. The skill of meditation offers a way to train the mind and cultivate ease, clarity, kindness, and awareness in our daily lives. Participants will learn techniques for formal sitting, standing, and walking meditation, as well as informal practices to establish and cultivate joy, open-heartedness, kindness, balance, and wisdom in any moment and as we go about our daily lives. Details on how to register are at the end of this article.

Note. The practices and ideas presented in each series are progressive. Attendance at the prior class is assumed in what is presented at each subsequent class, and the complete series is designed in order for participants to successfully develop a meditation practice. Please do not register if you will not be able to attend all four sessions.



Class fee. In keeping with the Buddha’s intention and instruction, the teachings are offered on a dana or generosity basis. There is no pre-established fee for the classes. Dana is the Pali word that is generally translated as *generosity*. Dana is based on the Buddhist tradition that the teachings are priceless. Janice offers these classes freely, as part of her own dana practice, to those with a sincere interest to learn.

In turn, students offer dana to her in appreciation for hearing and learning the teachings. True generosity is not a moral obligation, an egocentric gesture, or payment for services rendered. Nor is it an action taken with the expectation of receiving something in return, like praise, fame, or recognition of any kind. When practiced with mindfulness, giving generously is an opportunity to develop the qualities of kindness, open-heartedness, and compassion, while learning to “let go” of our attachment to concerns like the desire for acknowledgement, material acquisition, and attention. Dana is a way to express our individual appreciation to a teacher and our gratitude for the teachings and the unbroken lineage that began over 2,560 years ago with the Buddha himself.



Registration. To register, send the following information to uppekha@yahoo.com.

This registration is for Training the Mind.

1. Name
2. Address
3. City, State, ZIP
4. Phone
5. Email

An email confirmation, directions, and additional information will be sent upon receipt of your registration. For questions about this class, contact Jan at uppekha@yahoo.com.

Lead Sunday Night Sangha!

Our Sunday night sitting group has been peer-led for more than 20 years. On the first and third Sundays of the month, a 45-minute sit is followed by a talk and discussion led by a volunteer. If you’ve attended our Sunday night sits, we invite you to consider this opportunity. We’re a friendly group with a lot to say, so leading doesn’t mean preparing a formal talk or speaking for an hour. Below are some suggestions for leaders. And thanks in advance!

MADISON INSIGHT MEDITATION GROUP

Thank you for your generosity in offering to lead a Sunday night talk and discussion. Below are some approaches we’ve found helpful during our 20+ years as a peer-led sangha. If you have any questions, please don’t hesitate to contact [Tony Fernandez](#) or [Kathryn Padorr](#), Sunday night coordinators.



Suggestions for Leading a Sunday Night Talk & Discussion

1. *Stay grounded in your practice and your intention to share the Dhamma (Dharma). Draw on your own experience to investigate, illustrate, or deepen understanding of our shared experience.*
2. *Leave time for discussion. Know that you can rely on the group’s collective wisdom to create a rich conversation. And if discussion wanes, rest comfortably in noble silence.*
3. *Close with a sharing of the merit, in whatever words you find meaningful.*

Most important, remember that we are a very supportive group. Take joy in the sincerity of your intention and your willingness to lead for the benefit of others.

Anumodana!

Meet the Board of Directors

Madison Vipassana, Inc., is the nonprofit arm of Madison Insight Meditation Group (MIMG) and the organization behind the retreats announced in this newsletter. The board also serves as an informal steering committee for MIMG's activities—notably, [our three sitting groups](#) and other practice and community-building opportunities such as classes, half-day and daylong sits, a sangha-wide picnic, and recently, racial justice workshops.

We are currently saying goodbye to three board members and welcoming four new members. We're grateful for the service of Mike Kehl, Rick Nelson, and Kathryn Padorr who are stepping down, and we're pleased that Scott Knickelbine, Chris Lee-Thompson, Julie Meyer, and Christy Reveles have agreed to serve. They join continuing board members Lori Creswell, Kevin Dewan, Devon Hase, Christopher Keenan, Cathy Loeb, Jan Sheppard, and Ann Varda.

If you have questions or comments about any of the activities of Madison Vipassana or MIMG, please feel free to contact any of the members of the board. We welcome your involvement and good ideas.

Half-Day Sit

Madison Insight Meditation Group will hold a half-day sit on Saturday, April 1. The sit will be held in the Gaebler Living Room at the First Unitarian Society, 900 University Bay Drive, in Madison.

Our half-day sits begin at 9:00 a.m. (try to arrive a little early), and the formal practice ends at about noon. Three 45-minute sitting periods alternate with two 20-minute walking periods. If you can't attend for the entire morning, feel free to come for a portion of it. Plan to arrive just a little before the hour so you can join the last few minutes of walking and stay for the next sitting. The morning's practice is followed by a potluck lunch in the same location. Bring something to share if you can, but come anyway if you can't. Questions can be directed to Tony at tony.fernandez5@gmail.com. There is no fee or registration required. Everyone is invited.

Madison Dharma Community

Did you know Madison has a citywide sangha email list? The Madison Dharma Community list is intended for all Dharma practitioners in the greater Madison area. The list serves as a resource for anybody hoping to get the word out on Dharma-related news and requests to the widest possible group of interested practitioners. It's a place to post notices about retreats

and other practice opportunities, as well as more personal items, such as "practitioner roommate wanted" or "house available for rent." It also offers an opportunity for inter-sangha discussions about practice. Subscribing to the list is fast and, of course, free. Just go to [this link](#) and click "Join Group." The list is set up as a Google Group, but you don't need a Google account to join. The list is lightly moderated to prevent spam.

May the Madison Dharma Community list be of benefit to everyone on the path!

Join Us on Facebook!



Check out the [Madison Insight Meditation Group \(MIMG\) Facebook page](#)! Be sure to click "Like" to have us show up in your newsfeed. We're using the page to post announcements about upcoming MIMG events such as retreats, classes, and special guest speakers. If you attend one of our [weekly meditation groups](#), this is a good way to learn what else is happening at the other groups and in the broader MIMG community. We may also occasionally post inspiring Dharma quotations. If you have a photograph or reflections about our retreats or other events, please consider sending them by messaging the page directly—we'd love to post them!

Upcoming Retreats

Janice Cittasubha Sheppard, October 5–8, 2017
Pine Lake Retreat Center, Westfield, WI (residential)

Ajahn Sucitto, July 14–23, 2018
St. Anthony Spirituality Center, Marathon, WI (residential)

Rebecca Bradshaw, October 4–7, 2018
Pine Lake Camp, Westfield, WI (residential)

An Opportunity to Practice with Ajahn Brahm

June 14 and 15, 2017 – The Theosophical Society, Wheaton, IL



We are pleased to pass along news of this rare opportunity to practice with the venerable Ajahn Brahm. Ajahn Brahm is an internationally acclaimed Buddhist teacher and meditation master known for his support for the revival of women's full ordination in Buddhist traditions where it has been lost. Born Peter Betts in London in 1951, he graduated from Cambridge University with a degree in theoretical physics. Disillusioned with the life of academia, he headed off to the jungles of Thailand, where he trained under Ajahn Chah for nine years. A Theravada monk for more than 35 years, Ajahn Brahm is a revered spiritual guide and the abbot of Bodhinyana Monastery in Serpentine, Western Australia. He is also the spiritual director of the Buddhist Society of Western Australia and spiritual adviser and inspiration for Buddhist centers throughout Asia and Australia. Known for his wit and wisdom, Ajahn Brahm is the bestselling author of *Mindfulness, Bliss, and Beyond*; *Don't Worry, Be Grumpy*; *Who Ordered This Truckload of Dung?*; and *Kindfulness*.

Ajahn Brahm will offer a public talk on Wednesday, June 14, and a day of meditation on Thursday, June 15. The events will take place at The Theosophical Society, 1926 N. Main St., Wheaton, IL. Preregistration is required.

Mindfulness, Bliss, and Enlightenment

Wednesday, June 14, 7:00–9:30 p.m.

A self-described meditation junkie, Ajahn Brahm will share his knowledge and experience of the *jhanas* and insight, which constitute the heart of the Buddha's original teachings. The event will offer time for questions and discussion and conclude with a book signing. Tickets are \$10 for Theosophical Society members and \$20 for nonmembers. To register, visit theosophical.org/ajahnbrahm.

A Day of Meditation with Ajahn Brahm

Thursday, June 15, 9:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.

This is a rare opportunity for a day of practice under the guidance of Ajahn Brahm. The schedule will include sitting and walking periods, Dhamma talks, and Q&A. A vegetarian lunch will be provided. Tickets are \$90 for Theosophical Society members and \$110 for nonmembers. To register, visit theosophical.org/ajahnbrahm.

CLEAR MIND

The Newsletter of Madison Vipassana, Inc.
Madison, WI

This newsletter is published periodically as a service to our meditation community and is available on our [website](http://www.theosophical.org).

Editor: Cathy Loeb

To subscribe, send an empty message to:
mimg-subscribe@yahoogroups.com



Residential Meditation Retreat with

Ayya Medhanandi

May 21-24, 2017

10:00 a.m. Sunday until 4:00 p.m. Wednesday
Pine Lake Retreat Center, Westfield, WI
Sponsored by Madison Vipassana, Inc.

Ayya Medhanandi is the founder and guiding teacher of Sati Saraniya Hermitage, a forest monastery for women in the Theravada tradition. She took her first vows with Sayadaw U Pandita in 1988 in Burma, and she received bhikkhuni ordination in Taiwan in 2007.

During the retreat, we will create a renunciate environment by following the Eight Precepts (see below) and reflecting on every activity as part of practice. The retreat will be held in noble silence and offer morning and evening puja (chanting), sitting and walking meditation, daily instructions, and Dhamma talks. The morning and evening puja will include incense and the lighting of candles. There will be a morning and a midday vegetarian meal each day; we will refrain from taking food other than clear liquids after the midday meal.

Attendance at this retreat is for those who practice meditation on a daily or almost daily basis and have attended several three-day residential retreats or one residential retreat of at least four days.

The Eight Precepts (to be practiced during the retreat)

1. **Non-harming:** Not intentionally killing or harming any living creature.
2. **Non-stealing:** Not taking that which is not freely given, respecting the property of all beings.
3. **Refraining from false speech:** Speaking only what is true and useful, speaking wisely, responsibly, and appropriately. In the context of this retreat, this means keeping noble silence.
4. **Refraining from sexual activity:** Refraining from all sexual activity.
5. **Refraining from the use of intoxicants and drugs that lead to carelessness:** Abstaining from the use of alcohol or other *nonprescription* drugs. This does not apply to medically required drugs. Please *do* continue to take any prescription or over-the-counter medications you normally use.
6. **Refraining from eating at the wrong times.** Not eating from noon until dawn the next day. There will be a light morning meal and a main meal that is completed by noon. Around 5:00 p.m., tea and clear fruit juices will be available. Those with medical conditions that make it impossible to abide by this precept should discuss their situation with the registrar.
7. **Refraining from entertainment, beautification, and adornment.** Not indulging in entertainment, or adorning the body with jewelry, makeup, or other things that draw the attention of others or distract from turning inward.
8. **Refraining from lying on a high or luxurious sleeping place.** Not overly indulging in sleep or using sleep as a means of distraction.

Dana

In keeping with Theravada tradition, this retreat is being offered on a *dana* (freewill donation) basis. The ancient and beautiful practice of *dana* is described this way by Abhayagiri Monastery:

During the past 2,500 years, support for the monastic life has been provided entirely by lay supporters through daily acts of generosity. In this spirit, support in the form of work, money, foodstuffs, building materials or other help is both appreciated and needed. Your generosity allows the spiritual community to survive and to flourish. Theravada Buddhism has managed to keep the rich and vital interrelationship between lay and monastic

Residential Meditation Retreat with Ayya Medhanandi

May 21–24, 2017

communities set forth by the Buddha intact over the centuries. Theravada monastics, although renunciants, are not permitted to be recluses. To ensure this, the Buddha required that monastics be totally dependent upon the lay community for their physical support. Monks and nuns cannot handle money and can only eat or drink that which is offered to them. Reciprocally, the monastic community provides an important function for the lay community by caring for their spiritual needs and by providing moral and spiritual teachings and examples. The two communities, each essential to a balanced society, support and enrich one another within this economy of gifts.

There will be an opportunity to offer dana at the end of the retreat. Your generosity supports Ayya Medhanandi, the Sati Saraniya Hermitage, and the ability of Madison Vipassana to offer retreats. The bare costs for this retreat (use of the facility, including sleeping rooms; meals; supplies; and teacher transportation, room, and meals) are \$300 per person for a double room and \$442 for a single. These costs do not include any payment to Ayya for her teachings and time.

If you would like to learn more about the ancient and beautiful tradition of dana, two articles by Thanissaro Bhikkhu may be of interest:

- [The Economy of Gifts](#)
- [No Strings Attached](#)

Special needs

To inquire about special situations, contact Ann Varda at registrar.madvip@yahoo.com or (608) 843-7531. Please note that we are unable to accommodate special dietary needs.

Registration

Out of respect for others, please register only if you can make a clear and wholehearted commitment to attend. Early registrations are encouraged. Registration is on a space-available basis and must include the [registration form](#) and a \$100 deposit. The deposit is required to hold your spot; it can be refunded upon request (except for cancellations after April 24, 2017, as explained below), or it can be offered as dana. Your additional dana donations can be made at the end of the retreat.

Registrations will be handled on a first-received, space-available basis. Confirmation will be provided by email along with information on the facility, driving directions, and recommendations on what to bring. Registrants who do not get a spot will be notified they have been placed on a waiting list. Deposit checks from individuals who do not get a spot in the retreat or who cancel by April 24, 2017, can be refunded upon request. The deposit cannot be refunded to those who cancel after April 24. For questions about registration, contact Ann Varda, registrar, at 608-843-7531 or registrar.madvip@yahoo.com.

Reserved spaces for young people and people of color

We will hold a number of spaces open until May 8 to facilitate attendance by young adults (18–26) and people of color. We encourage young people and people of color to register; a spot may be available even if our website says the retreat is full.

Ride sharing

To request or to offer a ride to the retreat, contact Chris Keenan at Cbkeen44@gmail.com or 716-997-9361.

To register

Send a check for \$100 payable to **Madison Vipassana, Inc.**, with the registration form below to:

Madison Vipassana, Inc.
c/o Ann Varda
1724 Hoyt St.
Madison, WI 53726

Madison Vipassana, Inc.
Residential Meditation Retreat with Ayya Medhanandi
May 21–24, 2017
Pine Lake Retreat Center, Westfield, WI
— Registration Form ❖ Please Print Clearly —

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Birth date _____ Gender (optional) _____

Indicate if you are applying for one of [our reserved spaces](#) for . . .

Young adults Persons of color

Rooms . . .

Indicate whether you wish to register for a double or a single room:

Double room Single room

Room assignments are made by the retreat manager before the retreat begins. In assigning single rooms, we give priority to those whose health, mobility, or other special circumstances would make it difficult to share a room. If we are not able to accommodate your request for a single room, please indicate whether we should:

Place you on a waiting list for a single room. Place you in a double room.

Special circumstances or requests . . .

I would like to use to an assistive listening device. (If you have questions about our assistive listening devices, please contact Scott Knickelbine at scottknickelbine@gmail.com.)

I snore. I use a CPAP or other medical device.

If you have any other special needs, requests, or information to share with us, please explain below or contact the registrar, Ann Varda, at registrar.madvip@yahoo.com or 608-843-7531. _____

Sitting preferences . . .

To help us set up the Dhamma hall, please indicate whether you prefer to sit primarily on the floor or in a chair. We will have extra chairs, but not enough to reserve both a chair and a place on the floor.

Chair Floor

We will have just a few extra meditation cushions available to borrow during the retreat, so please bring your own cushion or bench if you have one.

A few last details and a request for help with setup and cleanup . . .

This is my first vipassana retreat.

I can help set up before the retreat. I can help clean up after the retreat.

I need a ride from _____ . I can give a ride to ___ passengers from _____ .

I enclose an additional \$ _____ to be used for scholarships for future retreats.

Send your completed registration form with a check for the \$100 deposit to:

Madison Vipassana, Inc., c/o Ann Varda
1724 Hoyt St.
Madison, WI 53726

Checks payable to Madison Vipassana, Inc.

Financial assistance is available through our retreat scholarship program. If payment of the \$100 deposit is a barrier to your registration, please contact the registrar, Ann Varda, at registrar.madvip@yahoo.com or 608- 843-7531 to discuss how we can help.