

CLEAR MIND



Residential Retreat at Pine Lake, October 7—10

Ginny Morgan

Ginny Morgan, a popular meditation teacher who has led a number of retreats for Madison Vipassana, Inc., will return to lead a residential meditation retreat October 7—10 at the Pine Lake Retreat Center in Westfield, WI.

Ginny Morgan is a guiding teacher for Show Me Dharma in Columbia, MO, and a former president of the board of Mid America Dharma, the regional retreat organization.



After working as a play therapist for acutely and chronically ill children for many years, she has shifted her focus to dhamma teaching, and working exclusively for dhamma activities. Her teachers include Ram Dass, Munindra-ji, Matthew Flickstein and teachers from Insight Meditation Society and Spirit Rock Meditation Center.

The October retreat will be appropriate for both beginning

and experienced meditators. Clear and simple instructions will be presented. The retreat will be held in silence except for question-and-answer periods. Sitting meditation periods will alternate with periods of

walking meditation throughout each day. The cost for a shared room is \$265, which covers a double room and vegetarian meals, teacher transportation, and other retreat expenses. Single rooms are available for an additional fee. In keep-

ing with Theravada Buddhist tradition, there is no charge for the teachings; however, a donation (*dana*) to the teacher is encouraged.

For more information or to register, see the registration form included with this newsletter. The form is also available online at www.vipassana.net.

To learn more about Ginny Morgan, see page 2.

Monk to Give Dhamma Talks August 15 and 17

At Sunday night sitting on August 15, and Tuesday night sitting on August 17, Venerable Pavaro Bhikkhu of Sitavana Monastery in British Columbia, Canada, will visit and give the dhamma talks.

Ven. Pavaro began his monastic training at Birken (now Sitavana) monastery in 2001. For many years he combined ardent retreat-going with the academic study of Buddhism and a busy family life. Fully engaged in the early flowering of Buddhism in Western Canada, Ven. Pavaro also meditated within the varied practice environments of such teachers as Ven. Piyadassi Mahathera, Ven. Madewala Punnaji, and Ayya Khema. He received his full ordination in November 2003.



We are fortunate that while Ven. Pavaro is in Wisconsin he is making a short trip to Madison to visit our meditation community. Don't miss this opportunity to learn from and talk with him. For times and locations of our weekly meditations, see www.vipassana.net/weekly.

Stepping Away from Center Stage

Ginny Morgan on the delusion of the solitary self

Don Juan said "Keep death at your left shoulder." I have a woodcut of a skeleton sitting on my left to remind us of the fact of impermanence — that things change, that things end, that this body will die, that this life will come to an end.

Our meditation practice teaches us to be fully present in each moment, awake to the truth as it is. But there is fear of looking deeply, fear of seeing, fear of fully apprehending death as it is — the death of things as we wanted them to be.

There is a story about a woman from the Buddha's time. Her deepest wish was to become a mother. She had been married for quite some time and had not given birth, so she kept praying, asking for a child to be born. Finally, she became pregnant and gave birth to a baby boy. It was a joyful experience. Not long after that, her baby died, and she became hysterical with grief. She refused to bury the body and wandered, searching for someone to restore her baby to life.

She ran to the Buddha. Offering him the baby's body, she said, "Please, if you would just bring this baby back to life."

The Buddha spoke to her out of compassion and wisdom — out of a heart that deeply felt her pain, balanced with the sword of truth, of clear wisdom. He said to her, "Go to the village and knock on every door. If you find a home where death has not touched the people who live there, get a mus-

tard seed from that house and bring it back to me. Then I will bring your baby back to life."

She went to the village, and you already know what happened. There was no home which death had not visited. When the woman saw this, suddenly her centrality, her sense of being alone in the center of a desolate universe was gone. There was still sadness and grief, but she knew that this was not her grief alone, that each being has suffered the same as she. She went back to the Buddha, bowed to him three times and said "I understand."

We don't realize that our minds create this same centrality. We go about our days thinking of "me" and "mine." It's not our fault. We are born into a culture in which this is the habituating matrix of our lives.

I was once working at a "Death and Dying" retreat years ago with two teachers of mine, Stephen Levine and Ram Dass, and things weren't going my way. I was becoming more and more angry and frightened. I went for a walk in the desert with another person who was at the retreat — it wasn't a silent retreat. My companion was a Zen Master. I was complaining about all the horrible

things that were happening to me on this retreat, and how I didn't like any of the teachers anymore.

All of a sudden, he looked down at the ground and said, "Oh my God, Ginny, jump back!" I thought he saw a scorpion or a rattlesnake. I jumped and said, "What is it?" He said, "Ginny, you are standing in a very dangerous spot. It's called

the center of the universe." It took me years to understand what he meant.

It's this centrality that we work with when we keep death at our left shoulder. We're working with the sense of "I, me, mine" — that sense of suffering that comes

when we believe that we have this self that we have to defend. We are working not only with physical death but also with dying into life, dying into each moment, dying into what's really here.

When our minds cling to centrality, we are lost, wanting things to be different. We learn to come back to the present moment over and over again — with gratitude, curiosity, interest, delight, with a kind of single-minded orneriness of patience. By seeing through the delusion of our centrality, our sense of separateness, we come to know our own extraordinary nature.

"Ginny," said the Zen master. "You are standing in a very dangerous spot. It's called the center of the universe."

Better Than a Coffee Break

Starting a workplace sitting group

For almost 10 years, members of Madison Insight Meditation Group have led a downtown sitting group over the Wednesday noon hour. The group began simply as the idea of a few city employees and was enabled by a supportive city employee assistance program.

Today, starting a workplace sitting group is easier than ever. Thanks to the secularization of mindfulness practice by people like Jon Kabat-Zinn and Madison's own Richie Davidson, employers support sitting groups without worrying that they are endorsing Buddhism as a religion. In Madison, many people have taken classes on meditation or have read books or articles about the benefits of mindfulness. This has created a critical mass of people who may be interested in a workplace sitting group.

The downtown group simply gathers at 12:15 p.m. and pulls chairs into a circle. A bell is rung and we sit for half an hour. Not all participants do a mindfulness

practice. Sometimes people just appreciate a half hour of shared silence! There are 25 people on the e-mail list; five to seven show up in any given week.

To start your own workplace group, you need to inquire about a regular meeting space. (Your human resources office might be helpful here.) You'll need a way to invite and communicate with your co-workers and perhaps others who work nearby. It is helpful to have a bell or chime to start and end the sitting. You'll also appreciate a sign that says "Please Enter Quietly" to post on the door, as people are likely to come in after the sitting has begun.

Be patient. You may have only a couple of people at some sittings. But as with many things, if people come to rely on its avail-

ability, a small sangha will likely grow.

Beyond this basic structure, much is possible. Seek someone to teach a lunchtime series on meditation. Have an occasional discussion over lunch in place of a sitting.

Obviously, sitting groups aren't limited to a work-site. You could start one with neighbors or in other settings. We're interested to hear if you get one launched. Feel free to announce it to the sangha. And take a deep bow for the intention to plant more seeds of wisdom and compassion within our community.

— Laura Berger



For information on the downtown sitting group, or for help in starting your own workplace sitting group, contact Laura at 608-238-7376.

Mindfulness for Smokers

Do you want to quit smoking or do you have a friend or family member who wants to quit?

If so, you may be interested in a UW research study for smokers older than 18 who want to quit. This study is investigating how mindfulness meditation may be helpful in controlling nicotine addiction. The study tries to offer all of the tools that have been shown to be most helpful in breaking addiction: group support, medication (nicotine patches), and meditation. Participants are provided training in mindfulness meditation and given free nicotine patches over an eight-week period. Those who complete the study are also given a small stipend.

For more information on the study call 608-265-5233.

Half-Day Meditation Dates

This fall, Madison Insight Meditation Group will hold half-day sittings from 9 a.m. to noon on Saturday, October 2, and Saturday, December 11. The October half-day sitting will be held at 9638 Shadow Ridge Trail, the location of the Tuesday night sitting (for directions see the entry about the Tuesday night sitting at www.vipassana.net/weekly). The December half-day sitting will return to its usual location at the First Unitarian Society.

Half-day sittings consist of 45-minute sitting periods alternating with 20 minutes of walking meditation for the three-hour session. If you can't attend for the entire morning, feel free to come for a portion of it. Please plan to arrive just a little before the hour, so you can join the last few minutes of walking and stay for the sitting meditation. The meditation morning will be followed by a potluck lunch in the same location. If you can, please bring something to share. If you have questions about these sessions, please call Dave or Lori at 608-238-1234. There is no fee or registration required for our half day sittings. Everyone is invited.

CLEAR MIND

The Newsletter of Madison Vipassana, Inc.
Madison, WI

This newsletter is published periodically as a service to our meditation community. It is also available on our website at: <http://www.vipassana.net>

Judy Woodburn: Editor
Cathy Loeb: Proofreader, duplication and distribution
Peter Kaufman: Mailing list

To subscribe, sign up at www.vipassana.net or send a message with no subject or content to: mimg.subscribe@yahoogroups.com

Folding and address labeling provided by



MADISON VIPASSANA, INC.
2522 Chamberlain Ave.
Madison, WI 53705