

CLEAR MIND



Gina Sharpe to Lead October Retreat

Madison Vipassana, Inc., is pleased to welcome Gina Sharpe back to Madison to lead a residential meditation retreat at Pine Lake Retreat Center October 11-14.

Gina Sharpe was born in Jamaica and immigrated to New York at the age of 11. She has an A.B. in philosophy from Barnard College and a J.D. from New York University School of Law. Before practicing law, she worked for the New York City government (the Lindsay administration) and in the motion picture industry and conducted research in public not-for-profits. As a lawyer, she practiced as a corporate litigator and then as a corporate lawyer. She also served as an executive in the fields of venture capital and mergers and acquisitions.

After retiring from the practice of law, she co-founded the New York Insight Meditation Center. She cur-

rently serves as a guiding teacher and president of its board of directors.

Trained as a retreat teacher in a joint teacher training program of Spirit Rock Meditation Center and Insight Meditation Society, she teaches at various venues around the United States including Spirit Rock, Insight Meditation Society, Vallecitos Mountain Refuge, Mid America Dharma, Garrison Institute, Asia Society, Tibet House, the New York Open Center, the Katonah Yoga Center and a maximum security prison for women. She has been teaching the Dharma since 1995.

The retreat is suitable for beginning and experienced meditation practitioners. Clear and simple in-

structions will be presented throughout the retreat and a longer

discourse will be given each evening. The retreat will be held in silence, except for question-and-answer sessions. The cost of the retreat, \$285, covers a double room and vegetarian meals and other retreat expenses. In keeping with Theravada Buddhist tradition, there is no charge for the teachings; however, a donation (*dana*)

is encouraged. Financial assistance is available through

scholarships. For information about scholarships and other retreat details, please see the registration form in this newsletter or online at www.vipassana.net. For more on Gina Sharpe and her teachings, see page 2.



Gina Sharpe

Jason Siff to speak on "Unlearning Meditation"

On Wednesday, August 29, meditation teacher Jason Siff will lead an evening meditation sitting and Dhamma talk. The event will be held at 9638 Shadow Ridge Trail, Middleton, 6:30-8:30 pm. Siff is the author of *Unlearning Meditation: What to Do When the Instructions Get in the Way*. His talk will focus on ways of developing gentleness toward oneself and interest in what goes on in one's meditation sittings. He teaches an approach to meditation called Recollective Awareness Meditation, which involves reflecting back on one's meditation sittings and becoming more aware of the various thoughts, emotions, and states of mind one experiences when meditating. He welcomes any questions or concerns people have about their meditation practice.

The evening will begin with a 45-minute meditation sitting, followed by a Dhamma talk and Q & A session 7:30-8:30 pm. For more on Jason Siff's teachings, visit www.unlearningmeditation.com. Questions? Contact Jan at janice.sheppard@yahoo.com or 608-829-0944.

Gina Sharpe: Reflections on Practice

The following reflections on Vipassana meditation practice are from Gina Sharpe's website and blog, the Power of Love. More of her writings and teachings can be found at: www.ginasharpe.org.

On Finding Freedom:

"Power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anemic. Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice and justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love."

—Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Every human being wants to be happy, to live a life of worth, to love and be loved. We wish to be treated with dignity, equality and justice. Yet, often we are besieged by sorrow, feel the sting of unworthiness, despair that we will ever find a way to love or, indeed, to be loved. Our world is one of increasing speed and complexity in which we are subjected to the oppression of growing inequality and injustice.

Many of us are unsure of how to respond appropriately to such oppression—what actions we can take that are aligned with our purpose. We ask how we can find a way into the peace, happiness, love, dignity and confidence for which our hearts deeply yearn.

The profound Path taught by Shakyamuni Buddha more than twenty six hundred years ago supports us in our intention to live aligned with our quest. This Path was shown by the Buddha in response to his deep insight that although we

seek peace and happiness, human beings often walk paths that lead to the very opposite results. Through meditation, reflection and a life of integrity, we encounter the beauty of presence; the mind, heart and body settle into stillness and the beautiful inherent qualities of kindness, compassion, joy and equanimity are awakened. Love and presence manifest in our lives as the freedom, dignity and peace we seek.

As Dr. Martin Luther King is quoted above, it is a powerful love that will liberate us from the ravages of injustice. We understand that transformation of our world begins with the turning of each individual heart towards freedom. We see that true social change begins with the wise heart that chooses generosity and love rather than self centeredness and ill will. Through the strength of love married to the power of wisdom, the appropriate response to our situation appears.

On a Heart at Rest:

Life can become so complicated and filled by our preferences and plans that we miss the actual simple experience of life as it is, of things as they are. We become attached to, and excessively rely on, our judgments, plans and ideas as if we really know what is going to happen. Although we can have a good guess as to how things will be, we really don't know. We don't know whether our time on this small rock we call earth will end tomorrow, or whether we'll win the

lottery (as my teacher once said, we have the same chance of winning as of their sending it to us by mistake!!!).

We can learn how happiness comes from a heart at rest and not from trying to control inexorably changing external circumstances, which we know, is like trying to capture lightning. All of this can be discovered as the power and fruit of our practice. That we can experience all the changes in form, feelings, mind and unfolding circumstances and remain centered and unflapped, with an open heart and a joyous spirit, is the jeweled discovery of practice. We can live in the cradle of equanimity—unshakable evenness, balance and stability in the midst of the inevitable vicissitudes of life.

On the Refuge of Sangha:

We all seek a peaceful, safe place in which we can rest. In what do you take refuge? In the teachings, we are encouraged from the very beginning to take refuge in what are called the Three Jewels: the Buddha (the awakened mind/heart), the Dharma (the teachings, the truth of the way things are), and the Sangha (the community of beings who have walked and are walking the Path). Let us reflect on the refuge of Sangha.

In Sangha we gather together to encourage each other to have the patience and determination to keep going, to fulfill the resolution that we have to end greed, hatred and delusion and discover true freedom. I know that even having been taught

how to meditate and to be generous with integrity, I could not have persevered in the practice without the companionship and support of spiritual friends. One of the most important things about being part of a community is the sense of honor and belonging with like-minded folks.

The quality of Sangha empowers that in us which encourages us to say, “You can let go of this, you don’t have to believe everything your mind conjures up, you can follow a different Path.” So this is why I feel in my heart that the Sangha is something that we need to deeply treasure and respect. Without the Sangha and its communal aspiration, so many of us would just fall away, caught in our desires, anger, worries, fears and distractions. Those qualities that are pure and noble within us would be lost, or not given the opportunity to fulfill themselves. In an ideal world, if we were all enlightened beings, we wouldn’t need communal support. But because there is work to be done, we need friends. We need to connect with people who respect what is good, spiritual and pure. Those connections will help maintain that capacity within us for the wholesome qualities of our hearts to grow and flourish. That is the power of the refuge of Sangha.

On Patience:

Patience is one of the ten paramis or perfections of a Buddha. To discover the perfection of patience in spiritual practice is to discover a quality of resting and waiting. It is in the waiting itself, in the listening, in what

the poet Rilke called “living the question,” in staying with the process of life, that spiritual practice is fulfilled. Patience—aah—taking a breath and resting where we are, in how things are.

Suzuki Roshi taught that a better word is not *patience* but *constancy*—a willingness to be ever present for what is. To simply sit, to breathe out and in, to be aware of whatever is present—thinking, discomfort, joy, love, sleepiness, sadness. Allowing

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what is to arise and pass in its own way and its own time. There is a resting in the rhythm of life and nature. Really, what’s the hurry? Where are we going?

Perhaps the opposite of impatience is not patience, but kindness, contentment and a spirit of wonder. It is the capacity to be kind, to rest and to trust. Sometimes in spiritual life we strive for progress. That can be like a bud on a branch deciding it has to hurry up and open. Rather, it

fills itself out slowly and gradually according to conditions, and then one day it blooms. Patience is very kind. It is like a slow walk in the country, like holding hands, like sitting in the sun—like planting an orchard that might take 10 or 15 years to bear fruit. How is patience manifesting in your own life—can you plant now what may blossom far beyond your own life?

On The Power of Stillness:

We tend to overlook the capacity we have to allow the mind to settle down and rest, to become deeply silent and peaceful. This stillness is a great power that we can develop in our meditation practice—through persistent discipline and deep kindness for ourselves. Through stillness, we learn to see, and listen more fully to, the wisdom of our own hearts and the world around us. We can support this quality of calm, of tranquility, by fostering, through attention to the calmness of breath in the body, inner ease and restfulness.

The value of this stillness is that it teaches us how it is to come to rest. Through the culmination of a steady practice, it is possible to be still in the midst of the mind storms. The most direct way of coming to rest mentally is by learning to let go of the domination of our likes and dislikes and come to live in the reality, the truth of each moment, just as it is. This means we can stop living in the desires, plans, and regrets of the mind and live in peace, even in the midst of activity. This is the power of our constant and consistent practice.

Sunday Night at Picnic Point September 16

On Sunday September 16, Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, begins. That evening, the Sunday night sitting group will mark the occasion by meeting at Picnic Point at 6 p.m. for a 45-minute outdoor sitting. After a short walking period we will gather for cake and conversation.

To get to Picnic Point, follow University Bay Drive past the First Unitarian Society building. After the drive curves to the right around a large playing field, you will see a parking lot for Picnic Point on your left. We will try to have someone standing in the lot with a sign until shortly before 6 p.m. Park in the lot and enter on the main trail. We will gather in the grassy area just to the left near the beginning of the trail. Bring what you need to be comfortable sitting outdoors—sunscreen, bug repellent, blanket, lawn chair, etc. If it is raining or there are threatening storms, we will meet indoors at First Unitarian Society in the new auditorium. Everyone is welcome to join us in celebrating!

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<http://www.vipassana.net>

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