

CLEAR MIND



Shaila Catherine to Lead One-Day Retreat

Madison Vipassana, Inc., is pleased to welcome Shaila Catherine back to Madison to lead a one-day retreat March 3 at Lussier Community Center in conjunction with the release of her new book, [*Wisdom Wide and Deep: A Practical Handbook for Mastering Jhana and Vipassana*](#) (Wisdom Publications). The retreat will use mindfulness with breathing techniques to develop concentration as a supportive condition for liberating insight. The practice settles restless thinking, focuses the mind, and overcomes common obstacles to



Shaila Catherine

concentration. Shaila Catherine has been practicing meditation since 1980 and has taught since 1996. Shaila has dedicated several years to studying with masters in India, Nepal and Thailand, and completed a one year intensive meditation retreat on concentration and jhana. Her first book was [*Focused and Fearless: A Meditator's Guide to States of Deep Joy, Calm, and Clarity*](#). Since 2006, Shaila Catherine has practiced under the guidance of Venerable Pa-Auk Sayadaw, and authored her recent book, *Wisdom Wide and*

Deep to help make this traditional approach to meditative training accessible to western practitioners. She is the founder of Insight Meditation South Bay, a meditation center in Silicon Valley.

The retreat cost of \$40 covers a vegetarian lunch, tea throughout the day, and other retreat expenses. In keeping with Theravada Buddhist tradition, the teachings are offered for free; however, a donation (*dana*) to the teacher is encouraged. For more about Shaila Catherine's teachings, see pages 2 and 3. For details about the retreat, see the enclosed registration form or www.vipassana.net.

Practicing Together:

Madison Vipassana Community Retreat April 28-29

If you can set aside a weekend for sustained meditation practice in a beautiful setting, please join us for our community retreat April 28-29. Everyone is welcome, whether or not you attend a regular sitting group. Unlike most of our retreats, this retreat is not teacher-led and offers no guiding instructions. Instead, participants gather to support each other in silent practice following a schedule of alternating sitting and walking periods. Meals and rest periods are included. There will be some times for talking as well. At least one optional small group session will be facilitated by a community dharma leader who can answer questions about your practice. After Saturday's dinner and an evening sitting we will gather to reflect on our practice. The retreat will end on Sunday with chances to reflect aloud followed by a talking lunch. The retreat will be held at Holy Wisdom Monastery in Middleton. This eco-friendly facility is surrounded by trails that lead through restored prairie and beside a lake. A limited number of rooms are available for those who wish to spend Friday or Saturday night. Those who attended our last community retreat appreciated the opportunity for sustained practice and the chance to get to know fellow dharma practitioners in a meaningful way. The cost for the non-residential option, \$60, covers vegetarian meals, tea, and other retreat expenses. For details, see the enclosed registration form or www.vipassana.net.

Shaila Catherine:

Curious to Discover: Who Am I?

Do you ever wake up in the morning and wonder 'Who am I?' and 'Who will I be today?' You might just pose that question once in a while. Let it be a question, let it be something that's not yet known, so that we give ourselves the chance to let go of the self-construction, the image, the roles, the identity that we created on the previous day. We can be curious about what is going to manifest through this mind and body on this new day. Sometimes we find that we're brilliant and other times we're dull. Sometimes we're cranky; sometimes we're calm. Sometimes we're openhearted and very sensitive, and other times we're a little callous, fearful, or hurried.

Which one is the *real* me? Which one actually describes me? Often we say 'I am this' or 'I am that'. I am a meditator; I am a teacher; I am an artist; I am a daughter; I am a mother; I am a son; I am an engineer; I am a doctor. I am short, tired, sick, healthy, strong, weak, a man, a woman, happy, angry, sad, grieving, frustrated. So many things that we experience, we put after 'I am....' and then we identify *with* that experience and *through* that experience. We identify with our roles and our relationships, with our activities, with our feelings, with our emotions. Yet these are all simply momentary experiences, social constructions.

We can ask ourselves - 'But am I *really* this?' Even when we find ourselves saying 'I am sad', we can ask ourselves 'Am I sadness, or is sadness simply arising?'

We can loosen the bonds of identification. We still function in roles, we still experience emotions; but can we loosen the grip of identification that arises around them. We can also investigate the 'I am' - what is the 'I am' that precedes the 'this' and the 'that'? Can we just *be*, without being 'this' or 'that'.

The Story of I and Mine:

Sometimes it seems like our life can be reduced to a particular pattern, almost like a holding pattern, almost like we're caught in something. Our life revolves around the story of that pain, or this relationship, or that job, or this trauma that happened to me at such and such a time; or this success, or this dream that I try to accomplish. If we grip the particular *content* of the story we might not see much beyond it, even though it's just a story. We might miss the vastness

of the silence and the stillness in which we abide if we're lost in our own narrative of life. Entranced by who and what we think we are, we might find ourselves absorbed into a realm of thoughts, until we find that we're just entertaining ourselves with one drama after another, and have not empowered ourselves to see beyond the realm of what the discursive mind can conceive. We limit ourselves when we give too much credence to the content of the thoughts.

Are Thoughts

Real? Or are they just thoughts? I don't think we can ask ourselves that question too often. When you notice that you're lost in thought, and then you wake up to it, you can do many things. If you are doing breath meditation, you might want to rush back to the breath. If you're just releasing the entrancement of

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thought, you might want to just release the thought and connect with whatever you experience. But before you let go of that thought I would encourage you to first have a moment, a brief but decisive moment, of seeing the thought, of investigating the process of think-

ing, to know actually what is happening in the moment when you're entranced by thought. Maybe we're planning something that we're going to do next month. Maybe we're judging ourselves, maybe we're fantasizing, maybe we're analyzing something. What is the experience of those thoughts? Really know the experience of thinking. Know how it *feels* to think. What is a thought - and why are they so seductive?

There's a Zen story of a monk who was an artist. He spent many, many years living in a cave. He would sometimes paint pictures on the wall of his cave. He was painting a picture of a tiger, and he made a beautiful tiger, with all of the tiger's stripes and all of the whiskers. As he was putting the finishing touches on the eye, he stood back to look at his work. Suddenly he screamed and went running out of the cave. Sometimes we do that to ourselves. We fabricate and paint a picture in our minds, and then we scare ourselves.

A Taste of Freedom: My teacher in India, Poonjaji, often

used the analogy of an ocean. He used to say that when we identify with our thought, we are identifying with a wave. However, it's a wave that doesn't know that it is ocean, so as we approach the shore we are afraid that we will be crushed. We'll be afraid that when we land on the beach we will be destroyed. But waves arise and pass, and they're never separated from ocean.

Like this, we're never separated from truth. We're never separated from emptiness. No matter how many thoughts we identify with, it's just like identifying with the wave. Thoughts are only concepts, and yet there is a knowing that occurs beyond the rise and fall of concepts, beyond the tides of thinking, beyond what words can describe and beyond what the intellect can grasp.

Drop All Concepts: The exploration beyond the realm of concepts invites us to venture into unknown territory, into a knowing that may not confirm the story that we have constructed; that is, the story of me. I invite you to drop all concepts. Drop the concepts of past,

the memories of all the fascinating things you've done. Drop the concepts of future; let go of all the brilliant plans and fantasies that you cherish. Drop the concepts of self-image, and the embellishments of your persona. Drop the concepts of what experience should be like, let go of expectations, comparisons, and all the demands that you place on your moment to moment experience.

Drop concepts of what meditation should be like, what our minds should be like, what our experience should be like, what a retreat should be like, what a dharma talk should be like. Allow yourself to enter the unknown present moment utterly free of concepts, unburdened by past and unadorned by self-image. Even drop the concept of what non-conceptual realization would be like, because, in fact, we don't know.

As Tsongkhapa said, "*Enlightenment turned out to be the opposite of what I had expected.*"



Excerpted from a longer talk by Shaila Catherine, entitled "I, Me, and Mine." The full text can be viewed online at <http://www.imsb.org/teachings/i-me-mine.php>

MIMG Meditation Classes

Did you start meditating on your own and feel you'd like some instruction? Are you meditating regularly but wondering how to keep your practice vital and engaged? Madison Insight Meditation Group offers regular introductory and continuing meditation classes taught by Janice Sheppard several times each year. The next continuing class takes place 9 to 11 am on five Saturdays: February 4, 11, 18, 25, and March 3, 2012. An introductory class will be offered in late spring 2012. Details and registration information are at www.vipassana.net/classes. Questions can be directed to Jan at Janice.sheppard@yahoo.com or

(608) 829-0944.

Half-Day Meditation January 21 and April 7

Madison Insight Meditation Group will host half-day meditation from 9 a.m. to noon on January 21 and April 7 in the Gabler Living Room, First Unitarian Society, 900 University Bay Dr., Madison. Meditation is followed by a potluck lunch. (If you can, please bring a food item to share.) The morning will consist of alternating periods of sitting and walking meditation.

If you can't attend for the entire session, feel free to come for a portion of it. Plan your arrival just a little before the hour, so you can join the last few minutes of walking and stay for the sitting meditation. No fee or registration is required. Questions? Call Dave or Lori at 608-238-1234.

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