

CLEAR MIND



Non-Residential Retreat July 29-31:

Gloria Taraniya Ambrosia with Janice Cittasubha Sheppard

Madison Vipassana, Inc., is pleased to welcome Gloria Taraniya Ambrosia to lead its July non-residential retreat. The retreat will be co-taught with Janice Cittasubha Sheppard.

The retreat focuses on the Buddha's teaching on equanimity and ways to cultivate it in our daily lives. This retreat will include Dhamma reflections, meditation, and discussion and is suitable for new and seasoned practitioners.

Gloria Taraniya Ambrosia has been a Dhamma teacher since 1990. She is a student of the western forest sangha, the disciples of Ajahn Sumedho and Ajahn Chah, and is a Lay Buddhist Minister in association with Abhayagiri Buddhist Monastery in California. She served as resident teacher of In-



Gloria Taraniya Ambrosia

sight Meditation Society in Barre, Massachusetts, from 1996 through 1999. She teaches at the Forest Refuge in Barre and is a member of the core faculty at the Barre Center for Buddhist Studies.

Janice Cittasubha Sheppard has been teaching meditation since 2002. Like Taraniya, she is a student of the Theravada Thai Forest lineage of Ajahn Chah and Ajahn Sumedho and received training as a

Lay Buddhist Minister at Abhayagiri. She also was trained as a Community Dharma Leader through Spirit Rock Meditation Center in California. Since 2003 she has led a weekly Tuesday night meditation for Madison Vipassana, Inc. She has taught meditation in Madison at Edgewood College and Yen-nien Doaguan, and currently teaches throughout the year for Madison Vipassana, Inc. She also

teaches meditation for *Mindfulness Training for Smokers*, a program to help people stop smoking.

The non-residential retreat will take place at Lussier Family Heritage Center in Madison, WI, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. July 29-31. Extended sitting times will be offered.

For more on Taraniya's teachings, see pages 2 and 3. For details about the retreat, see the enclosed registration form or www.vipassana.net. A list of lodging options for the retreat is provided on page 4.



Janice Cittasubha Sheppard

Additional Opportunities to Learn from Taraniya

By arrangement with Madison Vipassana, Inc., Taraniya will provide additional teaching opportunities following the retreat. She will give the Dhamma talk on Sunday, July 31, from 6 to 8 p.m. at First Unitarian Society, and on Tuesday August 2, from 6:30 to 8:15 p.m. at 9638 Shadow Ridge Trail in Middleton. Check our website at www.vipassana.net/weekly for details about these weekly sittings. Taraniya will also offer group or individual interviews to talk about practice. The group interviews will be at 9638 Shadow Ridge Trail on Monday, August 1, from 10:30 to 11:30 a.m., and again from 7:30-8:30 pm. Individual 25-minute interview times will be offered on Monday as schedule permits. Sign up for these individual slots will take place at the Tuesday night sitting on July 28 and the Sunday night sitting on July 31.

Gloria Taraniya Ambrosia: The Experience of Feeling

When feeling moments occur the tendency of the unawakened mind is to proliferate around them. We have highly conditioned tendencies to respond to pleasant sensations, feelings and thoughts with a certain longing for more. And we respond to unpleasant sensations, feelings and thoughts with a certain repulsion.

Seemingly automatically, we long for more good feeling and try to get away from bad feeling. And we tend not to notice, to ignore, or space out around feeling that is neither pleasant nor unpleasant.

In short, there is a strong tendency for pleasant, unpleasant and neutral feeling to escalate into the more complex, karmically weighty, and suffering states of greed, hatred, and delusion. And it is because of this tendency that vedana, or feeling, figures so strongly in the Buddha's teachings about freedom from suffering.

Everything up to this point—being born, having a body and mind, even the experiences of contact and feeling themselves—are conditions which have been set in place. There is nothing to be done about any of these. They are results, the outcome of past actions. However, the Buddha tells us in no uncertain terms that while there is a strong, conditioned tendency for good feeling to escalate into greed and for bad feeling to escalate into hatred or anger, we have the capacity either to go in the direction of our conditioning or not.

This capacity to choose means that greed, hatred and delusion are not fore-ordained. This is important because it points to a potential for freedom. In and of themselves these three are suffering states. And they

cause us to act in ways that bring about even more suffering. If we can become aware of vedana, feeling, and have a direct experience of it—we can short-circuit the tendency to move into these states that lead to suffering.

I am reminded of my junior year in high school—biology class. We put these little amoebae in petri dishes and observed their behaviors under our microscopes. When we put a drop of sugar in the corner of the dish all the little amoebae scrambled towards the sugar. Then we put a drop of vinegar in another dish and the colony scrambled in the opposite direction.

The significance of this laboratory experiment so many years ago escaped me until I began observing the tendencies of my own body and mind. I found that I am highly conditioned to behave in the same way as those cute little amoebae. Everything in our being at a seemingly cellular level moves us in the direction of more pleasure and less pain. Can you feel that?

One year I did a solitary retreat. The seasons were changing, and as a result the temperature in the room kept changing. I found I had to keep putting on blankets and socks and then taking them off again. At one point when I was several weeks into the retreat I was getting quite childlike in my reactions. I was in such a state that I again felt the heat in my body—quite automatically and violently I yanked off the blanket, tore off my socks and threw them across the room. I was so tired of not being able to control the good and bad feeling associated with the temperature of the room, that I became very angry and actually threw a tantrum!

This reaction really got my attention. I realized that this impulse to seek comfort and avoid pain goes very deep—deeper than a simple wish to feel good. We want to survive and that takes constant effort. I felt fatigued by it. I was sick and tired of being tossed about by it. But with this insight, I was able to surrender to the discomfort of too much or too little heat and learn to be with it.

The Buddha's teaching on liberation is inviting us to tune into our experience at such points, to examine and see for ourselves how easily we move into the states of greed, hatred and delusion and how opening to the direct experience of vedana, feeling, holds the key to short-circuiting that process.

Do you see what we are saying here? If we are not following the tendency to go towards pleasant feeling and away from unpleasant feelings we are left with the hard, cold reality that pain and discomfort are our constant companions and that pleasure doesn't last. We don't take kindly to that reality. Of course we want more pleasure. Of course we want less pain. Is Buddha suggesting that we don't seek that?

No, the teachings are far more subtle and significant than that. Buddha is trying to point us in the direction that self-observation takes us—that is, to liberating insight. He wants us to see for ourselves the truth of suffering, impermanence and selflessness. There is suffering. And no matter how good we may feel in any moment, that good feeling will end. Everything born of the body and mind follows the laws of nature. It is not self. As meditators, we can see

these truths directly by opening to feeling.

One summer my new friend Patty asked me to stay at her home and watch her cat Cobbie for the weekend while she was away. Everything went fine the first day. On the second morning I couldn't find Cobbie. I have to say that I didn't really worry, because Patty had told me that sometimes Cobbie stays out all night but finds her way home later in the day.

Well, Patty came home early and approached me with tears in her eyes. As she neared the driveway she saw Cobbie dead in the street. "Oh my God!" I said. I asked myself, "How could Cobbie have died?" In my mind I kept reviewing the events of the two days trying to figure out what I had done wrong. This is fine to do once, but I was obsessing. Patty was doing the same kind of thing. Had she instructed me correctly? Was it her fault that Cobbie had died?

Our minds resisted the pain of that truth and kept trying to find things to go to—doing everything they could do to avoid feeling the pain of suffering and death. It was as if we thought we could have done something to prevent the truth of death. But suddenly we caught each other's eye and simultaneously realized what we were doing. We both just cried, "Cobbie's dead!" Our hearts knew the simple truth. Patty and I opened to the pain of losing Cobbie instead of moving away from it.

Until we meditate, until we understand that we can't get away from what is happening in this moment, until we see directly that it is better to be with what is happening than to avoid it, until we train the mind to be with life in this way, we will tend to avoid direct contact with painful moments like this and miss the liberating insights that are our freedom.

I spent the better part of two years meditating at Insight Medita-

tion Society (IMS), and during that time I became quite attached to a certain cup and bowl. One day I arrived at the rack of dishes in the dining hall and noticed that my favorite cup and bowl were right on top. There were nice fresh, clean napkins, too. As I approached the food line thinking things couldn't get any better, I discovered that the cooks had prepared my favorite dish—a potato and basil and Parmesan cheese casserole. And somebody had baked fresh bread!

By now I was giddy with delight. I was thinking how nice it was and how I wish it could be like this all the time. I took my place at one of my favorite tables and began to enjoy my treasures—only to discover that the woman I sat next to made disgusting noises when she ate. It made me sick to my stomach. I sat there over my favorite bowl, eating my favorite food, wiping my tears and blowing my nose with my nice clean napkin. Sometimes the lessons of practice hit hard!

We can take comfort in the realization that while there is no guarantee that good feelings will happen or will last, it is also true that they are unavoidable. This, too, is a liberating insight. Pleasure is inherent in life. If we let it happen, it happens more fully. Remember that bumper sticker from a few years back that read, "[Poop] happens?" Well, I always thought we should have a complementary bumper sticker that reads, "Pleasure happens." Not only does it happen, you can't avoid it. I find this thought very comforting, don't you?

By observing the workings of vedana, we come to know the truth of selflessness—that pleasure and pain arise out of conditions. This was a revolutionary awakening for me. I always thought I could make pleasure happen. Of course, I can make it happen. I set everything up and it happens, right? Well, we can do things to establish condi-

tions for the arising of pleasure, but it may or may not happen.

We become wise when we stop trying to manipulate the world so that it is always pleasant or convenient, when we stop expecting to be content and comfortable at all times. This is an amazing reflection. The world is an irritating place sometimes. Sometimes it is wonderful. Seeing that is wisdom. The wise person doesn't create a problem out of either extreme. This is the middle way.

I was talking recently to one of the former long-term yogis from IMS. She practiced there for about nine months [when I was the resident teacher], and at nearly every interview she expressed concern that nothing was happening in her practice. I'd say, "Let me be the judge of that. More is happening than you think." But she wouldn't believe me. She had a lot of anger and frustration and couldn't imagine that she could ever be free of it.

Now she has stopped intensive practice and returned home. The other day she called me and said she couldn't believe how much things had changed. I asked her to describe the change. And it was precisely this subtle change that comes about by opening to vedana. She said that people still irritate her but she sees the irritation and doesn't get caught in it, so it doesn't mushroom into a coarse state such as hatred or anger. That was huge for her. She has had difficulty with certain family members, and the idea that she could begin to embrace them was the furthest thing from her mind prior to meditation.

How can we feel compassion for people who are irritating and difficult? How can we learn to be patient with ourselves when we get lost in reactive states of mind? Well, this is how it happens. We open to the unpleasantness of a moment's experience and let it be the way it is. Then it is free to end, free to die.

Places to Stay While Attending the July Retreat

Camping:

Lake Farm Park (next door to the retreat center). Register online at <https://www.reservedane.com> or call Dane County Parks at 608-224-3730.

Hotels:

Super 8 Motel, 1602 W. Beltline Hwy (Todd Drive exit). Call 608-258-8882 for reservations.

Days Inn, 4402 E. Broadway (Stoughton Rd. exit). Call 608-223-1800 for reservations.

Sheraton Madison Hotel, 706 John Nolen Drive. Call 608-251-2300 for reservations.

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