

SUMMER RETREAT 2006

Kamala Masters and and Steve Armstrong

June 9 – 11 or June 9 – 18, 2006

Christine Center in Willard, WI



Mindfulness of Mind

By Steve Armstrong

Mindfulness meditation is of two kinds: tranquility and insight. Tranquility or samatha meditation seeks to make the mind powerful and calm. Insight or vipassana seeks to develop understanding and liberating wisdom. These two practices are based on quite different ideas. Tranquility practice is trying to achieve something, i.e. collectedness, often called concentration, which is

subjectively experienced as tranquility of mind and body. Insight is just trying to see things as they are. To know what is happening as it happens in order to understand the way it is, the way things are and how they are related to one another. Therefore before beginning insight practice, it is important to understand: Why do we develop insight? What is the right

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Save the Date TCVC Annual Meeting

Thursday, May 4, 2006

6:00 Dinner (Optional. Please confirm by April 30th. Contact Mariann at 612-872-7959)

7:00 – 9:00 PM

Mai Village

394 University Avenue West,
Saint Paul, MN 55103
651-290-2585

The TCVC Steering Committee has begun work to incorporate TCVC as a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization. Nonprofit status will afford TCVC increased organizational structure and protections, as well as permit individual donations to TCVC to be tax deductible.

Please plan to attend TCVC's Annual Meeting to learn more about our progress toward nonprofit incorporation, and to celebrate TCVC's many years of service.

Newcomers and old timers alike are invited and encouraged to attend!

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attitude to meditate with? What is practice?

Most people meditate to be happy or peaceful. If you think about going to a new and unfamiliar place, it would be challenging to feel completely at ease initially. There would be some anxiety. With knowledge about the place, the people, what happens there, etc. you could feel more at ease. That's why knowledge is important; so that the mind can be peaceful. It is the same with the nature of things, truth, life in general. One needs to know what is right, i.e. what can lead to peace, what is beneficial and what is not. The objective of insight meditation is to know the truth or the nature of things. Understanding is the goal; happiness and peace are the resultant effects.

How to Practice Correctly

We need to know how to practice correctly or in the right way in order to develop wisdom. Wisdom is of three kinds. First is knowledge acquired from others by reading, listening, etc. If correct, this form of general knowledge can affect us in a positive way and lead to wisdom or wise relationship to life. The second kind of knowledge is gained from our own intelligence. We each have the ability to think logically or rationally. Using logic and reasoning can reveal new understanding or knowledge. Thirdly, using these first two: information and intelligence will help you to gain the wisdom that comes from understanding your own personal experience.

Just being aware or paying attention to yourself is not enough. You also need to know why you are pay-

ing attention and how to understand what you observe by paying attention. You also need to understand how you are going to observe or pay attention. The idea with which you observe yourself needs to be the right idea. By analogy, whenever anyone does anything, they do it with their own idea of how to do it. It is the same with meditation; you need the right idea to do it correctly. With the correct idea, one can think about meditation correctly and do it correctly.

Meditation is the work of the mind, not the work of the body. Thinking about how to meditate, why to meditate, etc. is also mind work, meditation. At the most basic level, meditation is about changing the mind from bad qualities to good. By practicing mindfulness, we develop the good qualities of the mind such as awareness, concentration, effort, faith or confidence and wisdom. Insight practice develops and balances all of these spiritual qualities.

Intelligence is Important

In insight practice, intelligence is very important; it is essential for gaining wisdom. In tranquility practice, effort alone is enough; intelligence is not so important. In insight practice, we invest our knowledge and intelligence to grow more wisdom. Again, by analogy, in business, initially, we need to invest a lot of labor to earn the money that we can then invest in order to get more money. One needs to think about how to earn, save, and invest; making wise choices along the way. In insight practice you need to think about how to practice effectively so you will invest your knowledge, effort and time effectively.

This thinking is not our usual kind of thinking, i.e. what makes us angry, what makes us depressed, fearful, etc. That is wrong thinking. But rather, we need to reflect on, what am I doing? How do I do it? How does it affect me? Is it helpful or not? Insight practice is not about blind obedience because someone has given me instructions. Rather, one should understand for oneself the purpose and value and how to meditate. For example, when we meditate, we may feel heat, cold, etc. Everyone feels heat, cold, etc. but not all such feeling is meditation. How you view what you are experiencing may be with right view or wrong view. With right view of observing what you are experiencing, that is meditation.

In meditation, you observe or watch your own body and mind. However, you should not think, "It is 'my body and my mind.'" Rather, it is just a body and a mind. It is just the nature of things. I have a body and can feel hot, cold, hardness, pressure, ache, etc. But I am not the only one who feels these things. These are universal; everyone feels them. It is natural to feel these things; it is nature. This is using your intelligence to think through something to understand how it is. Universal qualities experienced in the body are the nature of the body. So too with emotions and feelings, e.g. pleasant, unpleasant, happiness, sadness, etc. – they are the nature of the mind. They are also experienced by everyone; they are the nature of experience.

The mind is active; it thinks, pays attention, makes plans, etc. But every mind can do this. Again it is just a function or quality of mind. This

includes the defilements like anger, greed and delusion: experiences that every mind has, qualities every mind possesses. If you think, "I am angry." How does that make you feel? Thinking "I am angry, it is my anger," we become identified with it, and it is very difficult to see it objectively.

By meditating and seeing "this is anger," you can observe it objectively. If you see anger as anger, see it as the nature of anger, you won't feel so agitated by it. You won't be identified with it. This idea is very important in insight meditation, i.e. not being identified with what is being observed. It is very important because the sense of "I" is so strong, we take most experiences as "my experience, my body, my mind. It is I who feels, I remember, I do, I want." That is how strong our unconscious identification is! We need to change this wrong understanding in order to have the correct idea in the background when we observe experience in meditation.

The Work of the Mind

Remember, meditation is the work of the mind. Just for a moment, do this: Put the palms of the hands together or feel the sensations in your hands as you hold this newsletter. Can you feel the sensations in the hands touching? Are you sure?

Why can you feel the sensations? You can feel the sensations because you are paying attention. If the hands are touching each other or the newsletter but you are thinking of something else, you will not be aware of the sensations. This points out the work of the mind which is to know that the hands are touching.

The mind is paying attention and it feels the sensations.

This mind that pays attention, "Does it have a color? Shape? Form? Size?" "How do you know it is the mind?" We know, because we know it is doing something. It is working, i.e. knowing the momentary experience, of hands touching.

What you know, i.e. the object, the thing or experience being observed is not so important. What is important is the work that the mind is doing. The mind makes itself able

to know what is happening. There are many objects to observe: feeling, thinking, planning, etc." All these and more can be observed. Behind what can be observed is the mind that is observing. Meditation is to know these two: what you are observing and the observing itself. Of these two, the more important is the mind which is observing. What is very important is the mind that is observing and knowing whether it has the right attitude or whether it has the wrong attitude.

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Summer Retreat with Kamala Masters and Steve Armstrong:

Registration Deadline: May 19th, 2006

Yogi jobs are included in the retreat schedule for full-time participants. These half-hour mindful work periods will be assigned on a first-come, first-served basis at check-in time.

Attendance: Please plan to arrive by 6:00 p.m. on the opening day of the retreat and to stay for the duration. The weekend retreat ends at 5:00 p.m. Sunday, June 11th; the full-time retreat ends after the noon meal on Friday, June 19th. Exceptions must be approved by the retreat manager.

Meals and Facilities: Vegetarian meals begin with an evening meal from 6:00 –7:00 p.m. on Friday night and end with lunch on the last day of your retreat.

Accommodations at the Christine Center are shared with one or more people and vary from rooms in the main house to modern and rustic cabins. Room assignments are made on a random basis with the exception of those with special needs. In order to treat everyone fairly and to care for the container

of the retreat, preferences and roommate requests are not considered when assigning rooms. The Christine Center is also offering large single tents with cots, bedding and towels supplied. You may also choose to use an RV hookup or bring your own (BYO) tent.

What to Bring: Come prepared for the outdoors: flashlight, sturdy walking shoes, an umbrella and sunhat. Consider bringing boots as the grounds may get muddy if it rains. Bring an alarm clock and earplugs, if you are a light sleeper. Bring towels and bedding if you are staying in your own tent or RV. Christine Center charges \$2.50 for towels if you forget.

The Christine Center has extra meditation cushions, benches and floor pads, but not enough for the whole group. Bring your own if you can. Chairs are also available at the center.

Contact Joanne Skarjune:
612-724-9357 or
jskarjune@hotmail.com



General Information about TCVC Retreats

Insight Meditation (Vipassana) is a simple, direct and powerful practice—the moment to moment observation and investigation of the mind-body process through the development of a calm, focused, and balanced awareness. As stillness deepens, we begin to understand life and ourselves as a constantly changing process, thus beginning to free the heart/mind from fear and clinging. We awaken to living more fully in the present moment with greater wisdom, compassion, and an inner peace.

These retreats will be held in noble silence and will include sitting and walking meditation with clear instructions and dhamma talks. The retreats provide an introduction for new students and an opportunity for experienced students to renew and deepen their practice.

Dana: (Generosity) Since the teachings of the Buddha are considered priceless, they have traditionally been offered freely and out of the spirit of dana. Teachers for these retreats do not ask for or receive any payment from TCVC for their teaching. At retreat's end, retreatants may practice dana by offering a voluntary donation to express appreciation for the benefit they have received and to support the teacher's continued dhamma work and meditation practice.

Note: Please do not wear or bring strongly scented lotions or shampoos, perfumes, incense, essential oils, or aromatic balms.

Scholarships are available for up to 50% of the retreat fee. To apply for a scholarship, attach a letter with your registration, giving the background of your need and the amount of your request. Send a check for the retreat fee minus the scholarship amount requested. Those with financial resources may wish to help others by donating to the scholarship fund.

Registration: Send a check payable to TCVC for the full amount along with the registration form. Registrations are confirmed only by email unless you send a self-addressed, stamped envelope or postcard along with your registration. If you send a self-addressed, stamped business-size envelope you will receive some general orientation information. You can also retrieve this information under the Retreats section of our website at www.tcvc.info.

Cancellations: Notify the registrar as early as possible if you need to cancel. TCVC retains a \$25 fee for cancellations received after the due date, along with any cancellation fees charged by the retreat venue.

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Tranquility and Vipassana

Awareness or mindfulness is not forgetting to be aware of yourself in the present moment. It has nothing to do with focusing, but just not forgetting to be aware of yourself. Samadhi, often translated as concentration, does not require focusing very hard trying to see; samadhi means that the mind is stable. The mind is stable when it is collected.

Here you see the difference between tranquility and vipassana or insight meditations. In tranquility, you build up stillness of mind by focusing on a single object. In vipassana, we achieve the same stability of mind but not by focusing on one object. Instead, we don't focus on one object but rather try to be continuously aware. Eventually the mind will settle down. This settledness is samadhi.

In vipassana stability comes from developed continuity. To try to be continuous, we need to work intelligently and have the right attitude. We must know how to think in the right way. If you think rightly about what is happening to you, it will make you feel calm and stable. If you think wrongly about your experience, your mind won't be stable and you won't feel calm. Intelligence or right thinking is important.

In vipassana, we don't use a lot of energetic effort; we use wisdom energy, the energy of our intelligence to meditate. It is important to think correctly using intelligence. For example, if you believe hearing a sound or that thinking is disturbing your meditation, you will become upset. This is wrong thinking. If you have the right information, you will know

that everything is just nature. Everything is just an object to be aware of. All that is known is just how things are: nature, thinking, hearing, etc. are just nature. By meditating, you will just be aware of them as natural.

Right Effort

Right effort is not about arousing intense energy to focus or to try to work harder at it. Right effort is about not giving up. It is perseverance, the willingness to try again and again. The work of meditation is to pay attention all day, from wake up to sleep; not forgetting to observe yourself. It is not only about sitting, but how you are using your mind. When mind is aware, awake, or alert; that is meditation. Even if sitting, you could be thinking, lost in thought, sleeping, daydreaming; this is not meditation. Bodily behavior is not the work of meditation. The behavior of mind is meditation.

First, you just need to be directly aware of your experience—to know what you are feeling, experiencing. Just try to be continuously aware, to not forget yourself, no matter what you do or where you go. Be aware of yourself.

Second, be relaxed in body and mind, be comfortable. Don't tire yourself out by pushing hard. Vipassana is a learning process; not trying to create anything. It is just seeing what is happening. We just want to wait and watch the show. What does the mind notice?

We are not trying to concentrate, focus or penetrate the object. Just watch. Observe. Be aware. The energy of these two efforts is very different. Can you feel your sitting posture?

Can you hear sounds? Can you feel the air temperature? How much energy does it take to know these things? Is it difficult? Just being aware is not difficult. Anyone can do it. It is difficult to do continuously because we don't have the habit. The mind is habituated to watching what is going on outside itself, not the habit of watching itself. But if you use the energy to be aware of yourself throughout the day, you won't get too tired. If you try to focus on one thing for a long time, your energy will be drained. You'll become tired, and the mind will give up, being too tired of focusing.

Meditation is a marathon, not a 100-yard dash! Take it slow and steady. Do what you can to know as continuously as possible. You don't need to know all the details. Just ask yourself, "Am I aware or am I thinking right now?" Remember, what you notice, the object doesn't matter. To know what is happening in the mind or in the body is meditation. Just know that you are aware. Be as continuous as possible.

The right attitude is to be relaxed and accept things as they happen. Keep a simple mind. Don't ask "Why?" Just recognize what you notice. In the beginning, you won't know many things. But day by day your mindfulness builds up. The mind's ability to know becomes stronger, and it knows many more things as it builds up. Don't expect anything to happen. Don't resist anything that is happening. Just wait to see what is happening. ■

Steve Armstrong has studied the dhamma and practiced insight meditation since 1975. As a layman he was active for many years at the Insight Meditation Society in Barre Massachusetts as manager and board member. As a monk for 5 years in Burma under the guidance of Sayadaw U Pandita at the Mahasi Meditation Center in Rangoon he undertook intensive, silent practice of insight and lovingkindness meditations.

He studied the Buddhist psychology (abhidhamma) with Sayadaw U Zagara in Australia and presents it in practical and easily understood terms. He makes his home on Maui and has been leading meditation retreats since 1990 including the annual three month retreat at I.M.S.

Kamala Masters teaches retreats in the Theravada tradition at venues worldwide, including being a Core Teacher at the Insight Meditation Society at Barre, Massachusetts. Practicing since 1975, her teachers have been the late Anagarika Munindra of India and Sayadaw U Pandita of Burma with whom she continues to practice. Kamala has a commitment to carrying and offering the purity of the teachings of the Buddha in a way that touches our common sense and compassion as human beings, and allows the natural inner growth of wisdom. She lives on Maui where she raised four children, and is now blessed with five grandchildren.

Steve and Kamala are founders and teachers of the Vipassana Metta foundation on Maui, where they are currently developing Ho'omal-amalama, a sanctuary-hermitage for long-term meditation practice. For more information, see www.vipassanametta.org.