



REFLECTIONS ON CURIOSITY, CONFIDENCE AND CONTENTMENT

by Mary Grace Orr, Guiding Teacher

All of us have spent time with children, and we know that a favorite early word is, "Why?" I also have memories of my older grandson storming into a room and asking, "What is going on here?" And often, of course, in the span of our adult lives, we have the question, "Why me?"

Indeed. Why? Why me? What is going on here? Curiosity is often what brings us to practice, although it sometimes has the flavor of desperation. What is going on? What is this life about? Why is it that I am never happy? That my life doesn't seem to work? And so someone – a friend, a doctor, a book – points us toward the local Buddhist meditation center. We take a class, attend sittings, go to a retreat.

In mindfulness practice, we are advised to give our attention to the experience of each moment. Seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, smelling, and the mind. We try our best to penetrate each experience with our awareness: What is happening? What is the event we call pain? Or sadness? Or desire? One of my teachers advised me that curiosity was a most valuable spiritual tool; he also pointed out that there is no end, in this lifetime, of things to be curious about!

On the Buddhist list of the elements that lead toward waking up, investigation is one of the seven factors. When we train in curiosity, we move away from the often difficult question, "Why me?" The conditions of our experience become much more interesting, and we find that we suffer less when we move towards exploration of just the "why" (drop the "me"). We suffer less when we can rest with what is with an investigative and curious awareness. The "me" moves away from the center of the situation. Practicing in this way,

we are happier. So we develop confidence in the practice. We have tried it, tested it, used it over some time, and we know that it works. We also develop confidence in our ability to meditate and to live within the teachings of the Dharma. We have confidence in the Dharma itself, in the teachings of the Buddha.

This is not egocentric confidence, an inflated idea of what we ourselves can do. In fact, whenever I get caught in that sort of thing, I usually end up suffering a lot. Again! Clinging doesn't work! Waking up is useful! The Buddha was right, one more time.

With this confidence supporting our curiosity, we go deeper into our practice, penetrate even further into the nature of our experience. And we develop the factor of contentment. The Buddha wanted beings to be contented. When we trust our practice and trust the teachings, we can relax into every moment – not just the ones we like. We relax, knowing that we are not the center of the world, we relax because we are not so swayed by desire and aversion. We are contented with the experience that has arisen, instead of constantly trying to adjust and to fix it. We are contented with what is.

*Whatever what is is,
is what I want.*

Only that.

But that. (Galway Kinnell)

Curiosity, confidence and contentment support each other. Each factor allows us to go deeper with the other two. Please be curious about your experience. What is going on here? Please develop confidence in the training of the mind and heart by doing the training. And please enjoy your contentment each time it arises!

IN SERVICE OF THE SANGHA

By Valerie Nelson, Volunteer Coordinator

In the book *Seeking the Heart of Wisdom*, Jack Kornfield explains the practice of generosity of service in Buddhism as follows, "the spirit of service asks us to touch and act from a deeper place, a chord of the heart that responds to life out of connectedness and compassion, independently of results."

When I first started volunteering at VSC my motivation was primarily self interest; I wanted to meet people in the sangha; to feel that I knew someone when I walked in the door to a sitting; to have someone recognize me and say hello. The first time I opened and closed for a day long sit, I felt happy that the teacher thanked me sincerely for helping out.

Those benefits of volunteering for our sangha are still with me. I still enjoy seeing people I know and having someone say "hello" to me, enjoy being on a "team" with other practitioners. My motivation, however, has changed as my practice has deepened. I find myself wanting to be more generous in supporting our programs and teachers.

Some of us have time. Some of us have money. Some of us have both, or perhaps feel we have neither. Looking deeply into my heart I am able to decide how I can best use my time and my money in this service. I hope you will do the same.

Please consider expanding your personal practice of generosity to include volunteering some of your time and skills to keep us "up and running." Some commitments are on a scheduled routine basis. Others are as needed. For instance, a volunteer might clean our Center ten minutes a week, or thirty minutes once a month, or just for a special event. You can read about our sangha's needs and volunteer by filling out a form on the table at the Center or on our web site.

Thank you for your precious gift of time to Vipassana Santa Cruz!



SANGHA NEWS AND INFORMATION

WHO'S WHO AT VSC

TEACHERS

Mary Grace Orr, *Guiding Teacher*
 Bob Stahl, *Associate Teacher*
 Richard Shankman, *Associate Teacher*
 Carla Brennan, *Teacher Trainee*
 Jill Hyman, *Community Dharma Leader*
 Dan Landry, *Community Dharma Leader*
 Bruce Hyman, *Mentor*
 Marcy Reynolds, *Qi Gong Teacher*

BOARD MEMBERS

Ann Zweig, *President*
 Bill Culman, *Treasurer*
 Margaret Seidler, *Secretary*
 Mary Grace Orr
 Dan Landry
 Carla Brennan
 Alice Tarail
 Ann Russell
 Val Nelson
 Carol Van Der Bos
 Gee Shulz
 Jason Murphy

FACILITIES MANAGERS

Ann Russell
 Carol Van Der Bos

EVENT COORDINATOR

Mary Lou Nicoletti

VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR

Valerie Nelson

OMSBUDPERSON

Heidi Renteria

ONE YEAR AT 1010 FAIR!

On August 2nd we are celebrating our first year at our new home at 1010 Fair Avenue with a potluck dessert after the meditation and talk. We have seen the center grow and flourish during this time and are excited about the years to come! Thank you to everyone who, through donations of time and money and support, made our new center possible.

CHANGES ON THE VSC BOARD

We are sad to see Bruce & Jill Hyman leave the VSC Board but we are exceptionally grateful for their very hard and consistent work over the past several years. Fortunately, they will continue to be present and active through teaching and support.

We are happy to welcome four new members to the Board: Val Nelson, Carol Van Der Bos, Gee Shulz, and Jason Murphy.

OMSBUDPERSON

VSC has an ombudsperson. What's that? An organizational ombudsperson is a confidential and informal information resource, communications channel, complaint-handler, and dispute-resolver, and a person who helps an organization work for change.

Our ombudsperson is Heidi Renteria, who welcomes you to call her at (831) 458-9039 to discuss any problem or situation within the sangha in which you feel values of fairness and respect are not demonstrated in words and deeds. These may include conflicts or difficult situations within the group or with teachers, the board, or others related to the sangha. Such conversations with the ombudsperson are kept completely confidential.

BOOKKEEPER NEEDED

Our sangha is in need of a bookkeeper. You need to know Quickbooks and Excel. Please apply to one of our Board-members in order to perform this task.

OTHER VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Here are some of our current volunteer needs. For more information on any of them, please feel free to ask Valerie Nelson, one of our teachers, or a Board member;

- Cleaning the meditation area is an honored Buddhist tradition. Our cleaners help for 10 minutes after a weekly sitting, or 30 minutes once a month, or clean before and after a special event.
- If you have graphic design skills, please consider joining Robin Sales on that team in order to develop flyers for our events.
- Do you have carpentry, mechanical, electrical or other "handy-person" skills? We would like to establish a team of volunteers who can be contacted when a need arises.
- Assisting with a special event or being a contact person for an event is another great way to give service to the sangha.

STARTING A "DHARMA FRIENDS" GROUP

What is a Dharma Friends group? The Buddha emphasized the importance of having *kalyana mittas* – spiritual friends – to accompany us on our spiritual path. Dharma Friends Groups are a way to meet with others in the sangha for support, study, sharing, friendship and fun. The groups are initiated, organized and led by members of the sangha.

Some suggestions for groups include: book groups, topic groups (aging, chronic illness, raising children, for example), walking groups. For guidelines and help in organizing your own Dharma Friends Group contact Margaret Seidler: bargaret@att.net, or 831-689-0670 or Valerie Nelson

VSC CONDUCTS SURVEY IN MARCH 2007

Fifty people completed a survey which assessed sangha members' interest in courses, retreats, programs, events and projects, sitting days and times, and to determine connectedness to the sangha, the board, and the teachers. Suggestions were welcomed throughout. Most had practiced more than 5 years, attend VSC 2-5 time per month, and had specifically practiced with VSC for varying years.

There was interest in all suggested classes to warrant establishing any one of them. There was great interest in all retreat suggestions: residential, householder, day long, 2-day nonresidential. Though there was enthusiasm for all programs, events, and projects, the greatest was for social events.

Sitting preferences ran the gammit, but clearly, there is an interest for regular Sunday morning practice. Most people feel welcomed at VSC, yet don't feel well connected. Communication with the board is okay. Many suggestions were made and quickly instituted; more will follow.

VESAK & COMMUNITY MEETING IN MAY

On May 31st we celebrated Vesak – a Buddhist holiday honoring the birth, enlightenment, and death of Shakyamuni Buddha – with qi gong led by Marcy Reynolds, a delicious potluck dinner and a



SANGHA NEWS AND INFORMATION

meditation and blessing ceremony led by Mary Grace Orr.

This was followed by our first community meeting. During the evening, the Board members and other volunteers were introduced, Mary Grace gave a brief history of VSC, and Jill Hyman talked about our tradition of *dana*. Bill Culman explained our financial structure and status with a Power Point presentation. Jill then summarized the March 2007 survey results.

We ended the evening with small group discussions; each group was asked to list the three current strengths and weaknesses of VSC and give ideas about what they would like to see at VSC in the future. Some strengths included the variety and quality of teaching, having our own center, and the depth of commitment to practice. Some weaknesses included a need for more welcoming and inclusion, a lack of diversity, and the center's inconvenient location for some. Suggestions were made for more social events, community outreach, more weekly group sittings, more contact with monastics, and more social events.

SANGHA TAPE AND BOOK LIBRARY

In the small room off the meditation hall is a large case that contains a variety of Dharma-related audio cassettes, CDs and DVDs. You can check out an item by finding its card in the small box on the table and signing your name. We will soon also be offering dharma books.

PRISON PROJECT

Several members of Vipassana Santa Cruz have been leading Buddhist meditation programs in both Salinas Valley State Prison (SVSP) and Correctional Training Facility (CTF) for 7 and 4 1/2 years respectively. The programs were started by Richard Shankman who had a long history of doing prison work and was able to achieve the difficult task of getting the programs approved. The program at CTF runs on Tuesday evenings and the SVSP program runs midday on Tuesdays.

The programs differ due to different levels of security. CTF is a level II (medium security) and SVSP is a level IV (maximum security) prison. In general programs consist of opening

Qi Gong or Yoga, guided meditation, short dharma talks, discussion and closing metta.

We the volunteers find the the work profound. Stereotypes are erased, great compassion arises and our showing up is a wonderful expression of generosity. The work has become a fundamental part of our spiritual journeys.

If you are interested in getting involved in the Prison Project, contact Bruce or Jill Hyman at: jbhyman@earthlink.net.

DANA (DONATIONS)

Vipassana Santa Cruz is dedicated to continuing the ancient Buddhist tradition of freely offering the Dharma without charge, knowing that it is priceless. We encourage the practice of *dana*, which means generosity in Pali (the original language of the Buddha). The generosity of our community supports the teachers and pays all of our sangha's expenses: rent, utilities, insurance, phone, supplies, bank and bookkeeping charges, website, etc.

Gifts of any amount are very welcome and much appreciated. It's especially helpful if you can commit to contributing a certain amount each month. Donations to Vipassana Santa Cruz, a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization, are fully tax-deductible and can be made in any of the following ways:

- BY CREDIT CARD

On our website (www.vipassanasc.org) you can use Network for Good. It is possible to make this a recurring monthly, quarterly, or annual donation.

- IN PERSON

There are donation baskets at each VSC program, one for Teacher Dana and the other for Sangha Expenses. You may donate by cash or check, made out to Vipassana Santa Cruz.

- BY MAIL

Donation checks, made out to Vipassana Santa Cruz, may be mailed to: Vipassana Santa Cruz
1010 Fair Ave., Suite C
Santa Cruz, CA 95060

- THROUGH AMAZON

Please patronize your independent bookstore, but if you are intending to shop at Amazon's online store, please use the Amazon link on our website. By clicking on this link, VSC receives a small percentage

of your purchase price at no cost or hassle to you.

- ENROLL IN E-SCRIP

E-Scrip is an effortless way of raising funds for VSC. If you register your grocery club card, and/or credit/debit cards with eScrip, the participating merchants donate a small percentage of your purchases to VSC.

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

Individual interviews with teachers can be arranged. These are opportunities to ask questions and receive support and Dharma guidance. It is most useful if you come to an interview with specific questions or concerns with your formal meditation practice, with integrating practice into your daily life or understanding the teachings. These meetings are offered to students on a *dana* basis.

Mary Grace Orr can be reached by e-mail, mgrace.orr@gmail.com, and also at 688-3958. She will schedule according to mutual convenience during a weekday.

Carla Brennan will be periodically scheduling approximately 30-minute interviews at the Center on Wednesdays at 4:30, 5:00, 5:30, 6:00 pm. Other times may also be arranged. If you would like to arrange an interview with Carla, please contact her at 831-336-0136 or carlabrennan@hotmail.com.

Bob Stahl can meet with people at his office in Santa Cruz. To schedule an interview and get directions, he can be contacted at (831)469-3338 or bob@mindfulnessprograms.com.

MAILING LIST & CHANGE OF ADDRESS

To be added or removed from our mailing list or to update your contact information, use the form on the website at: <http://www.vipassanasc.org/contact.html> or go to the website and click on "Contact". For VSC Newsletter questions, contact Carla Brennan at carlabrennan@hotmail.com.

VSC PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

Please check the website regularly for any additions or changes to the schedule and for registration information.

www.vipassanasc.org

REGULAR MEDITATIONS

TUESDAYS, 12 NOON – 1:15 PM

A 45-minute sitting followed by a short Dharma talk and discussion

WEDNESDAYS, 7 AM – 7:45 AM

A 45-minute sitting with chanting led by Dan Landry.

THURSDAYS, 5:30 – 6:30 PM

Qi gong with Marcy Reynolds.

THURSDAYS, 7:00 – 8:30 PM

A 45-minute sitting followed by a dharma talk and discussion.

SUNDAYS, 6:00 – 7:30 PM

Santa Cruz Dharma Punx is a alternative weekly mind body awareness Vipassana-based meditation group; this is dharma with a twist. The group leader is Jason Murphy plus other guests teachers. We are a part of the “Dharma Punx” meditation groups nationwide.

MONDAYS, 7:00 TO 8:30 PM

St. Andrews Episcopal Church
101 Riverside Ave, Ben Lomond

A 45-minute sitting followed by a dharma talk and discussion. (Group is cancelled on Federal Monday Holidays.)

SUNDAY MORNING MEDITATION

Starting in September there will be a 45-minute meditation every Sunday at 9:30 am. The first Sunday of the month the sitting is followed by the Family Program; the third Sunday of each month there will be an entire morning of practice. The second and fourth Sunday meditations will be led by practice leaders.

MONDAY & FRIDAY NOON MEDITATIONS

Also starting in September there will be weekly 45-minute meditations every Monday and Friday at 12:00 pm. These will usually be led by practice leaders.

SUNDAY COMMUNITY AND FAMILY PRACTICE DAY

First Sunday morning of each month:
Aug. 5, Sept. 2, Oct. 7

9:30 - 10:15 sitting
10:30 - 11:30 family program
11:30 - 12:00 tea & informal talk
The family program may include: movement (walking, yoga or Qigong), storytelling, dramatization, meditation, singing.

CLASSES

WHEN THINGS FALL APART

Fridays, August 10 - September 14
10:00 - 11:45 am
with *Carla Brennan*

We will use readings from Pema Chodron's book, *When Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice for Difficult Times*, to explore applying Dharma practice to daily life situations. Space is limited, registration is necessary. Please only register if you can make at least 4 of the 6 meetings.

32 PARTS OF THE BODY

Intro to the 32 Parts of the Body:
Friday, Oct. 5, 10:00 – 11:30 am
Class Dates: Friday Mornings, Oct. 19 – June 20, 2008; 10:00 am – 12:00 pm.
with *Bob Stahl*

The methodical practice of the 32 Parts of the Body Meditation can help one penetrate and understand the true nature of the body. It can build immense levels of concentration, potentialities for healing, and experience the taste of deep freedom and peace.

RETREATS

LEARNING TO LET GO

Sat., August 11, Sun., August 12
9:30 am - 4:00 pm
with *Carla Brennan*

This two-day nonresidential retreat will explore the Buddhist teachings of letting go and nongrasping. Understanding these helps us release the unnecessary resistance and contraction that cause suffering in our heart, mind and body. We can then experience a new freedom through ease, openness and radical acceptance. The retreat will alternate between sitting and walking meditation and short teaching periods.

DAYLONG FOR TEENAGERS, YOUNG ADULTS, & THE YOUNG OF HEART

August 18, 9:30 AM - 4:30 PM
with *Jason Murphy and Bob Stahl*

A day of sitting and walking meditation as well as mindful movement. Explore the Buddhist path of awakening as the ultimate form of anti-establishment action, serving both personal and social transformation.

CULTIVATING THE MINDFULNESS OF DEATH: MEDITATING ON IMPERMANENCE

Sun., September 23, 9:30 am - 4:30 pm
with *Bob Stahl*

Location: Santa Cruz Memorial Cemetery in the Chapel, 1927 Ocean St. Extension, Santa Cruz

Classic Buddhist meditation contains profound teachings on the mindfulness of death. By cultivating awareness of impermanence, one can develop a deeper quest for wisdom. There are nine specific meditations beginning with the first day of death and eight subsequent stages of decomposition until the body turns to dust. This one-day retreat combines periods of sitting and walking meditation and will be held in a cemetery. There will be chairs, but you may want to bring a meditation cushion, lunch, and blanket.

SEVEN-DAY RETREAT

October 5 -12, 2007
with *Mary Grace Orr, Bob Stahl, & Gail Lewis*

Location: Hidden Villa, Los Altos, California.

This is a silent mindfulness retreat with alternating sitting and walking meditation, as well as instruction, Gail Lewis, CMT, will provide yoga instruction. The retreat will be conducted at the Hidden Villa Hostel near Los Altos. This retreat is offered entirely on a *dana* or freely given basis.

DHARMA FRIENDS GROUPS

DHARMA LUNCH BUNCH

Last Tuesday of the month, starting July 31,
Contacts: Valerie Nelson, Ann Russell, Carol VanDenBos

Would you enjoy meeting with dharma friends and expanding your sangha connection? Meet with Val, Carol or Ann in the foyer after the noon sit, and we will walk or drive to Kelly's. Bring a lunch or buy something to eat there.