



S U M M E R / F A L L 2 0 1 2

Mid America Dharma News

What **IF** Mid America Dharma didn't exist?

Would you miss us? Would it matter to your exploration of mindfulness to no longer have access to retreats in this area? Some of us have served for 18 years, bringing retreats to the Midwest. The Board members are getting tired.

Does the continuation of Mid America Dharma matter to you? Would you consider serving on the Board? We need people, committed to mindfulness practice and willing to provide a few hours of each month of service to the Dharma. We have enjoyed the opportunity to bring teachers to the Midwest and to grow local teachers. We like providing a close and relatively inexpensive retreat opportunity and we need your help.

Someone out there is willing to join us and provide a new perspective on Mid America Dharma. The Board operates by consensus and we are a congenial group, meeting quarterly. Some jobs that Board members take require a few hours a month, others more time.

Go to www.midamericadharm.org and contact us to find out how to serve the dharma.

Fresh Insight by Shaila Catherine

“Where do you search for fresh insight? Do you turn to classes, books, teachers, or nature? Meditation invites us to look carefully into our own material and mental experience.”—from Shaila Catherine. *Wisdom Wide and Deep*, page 389

Instead of looking outside of yourself for understanding and insight, sit quietly and look into your own experience of mind and body. What is really happening right now? Meditation can be as simple as seeing your own experience of sitting and breathing with clarity. Settle the mind by observing the in-breath and out-breath. You don't need to wait until you sit in a formal meditation posture—feel your own breath right now as you are facing this article. Observe the dynamic changes that occur in sensory contacts such as touching, smelling, and hearing. Are you feeling any touch sensations such as the pressure of the body against the floor, chair, or clothes? Do you hear any sounds or smell any odors? (Fresh Insight continues on page 2)

THE PRACTICE OF ACCEPTANCEby **Philip L. Jones**

Like most meditators, I've often had the experience of noticing that I've become lost in thoughts about some incident in my life. It often involves a desire for something or anger over what has happened. When I get caught in these stories, the mind, heart and body become more tense and cramped. There is suffering. How can we relate to these experiences so that we allow more freedom into our lives rather than creating more suffering?

When we get caught in these thoughts we are usually wishing that things would be other than the way they are. We think that if we could just get things adjusted right, then everything would be perfect. If we pay close attention, though, we will see that no matter how much we fiddle with things, we can never make them perfect. So our practice is not about attaining some kind of perfection or about abolishing what seems imperfect. A cornerstone of practice is acceptance that this is what is present in this moment. We cannot clearly see what we are experiencing, whether sense desire, pain, or joy, if we are unwilling to accept it as it is, if we are always trying to push it away or to hold it tightly in our fists. So we have to begin with some acceptance. This is often a very big step as most of our life conditioning is screaming at us to hang onto the pleasant and to not let the unpleasant in. It takes quite a bit of courage, trust, wisdom, and maybe a bit of desperation, to let go and to meet this moment of life with acceptance. But if we pay attention, we'll find that acceptance creates spaciousness. From this space we can explore or investigate the unskillful, the ways that suffering is created, and the skillful, the ways that peacefulness and freedom from suffering arise.

The tools that we use to investigate the skillful and the unskillful are, along with this spacious acceptance, mindfulness and compassion. We look at things without judgment or making decisions based on them or getting caught in stories about them and with kindness. As a result of this we

(Shaila Catherine – Fresh Insight continued)

Fresh insight comes when we are attentive to experience—not lost in concepts about what experiences might mean, but actually present to what is real. I ask myself periodically: What is really happening now? This inquiry pulls me out of any habitual thoughts, and draws my attention to the simple experiences of body and mind. Many times a day we can bring curiosity to our experience by asking ourselves: what is really happening now?

develop trust in the power of mindfulness, because we see that when we allow things to come fully into awareness and meet them with mindfulness, acceptance and compassion, rather than trying to hold on or to push away, then they also pass away. We are, in effect, abandoning them by allowing them to be what they are: impermanent and impersonal thoughts and sensations. This is how we can relate to our experiences without creating suffering. Through acceptance, mindfulness and compassion we learn that we can simply rest in awareness and let things be.

This isn't a matter of belief. Look for yourselves. Does striving to be pure and perfect lead to a peaceful, contented life? Or is it a way to create suffering? Does acceptance, mindfulness and compassion lead to suffering? Or is it the way to contentment? Look for yourselves and see.

Mid America Dharma Retreats

Shaila Catherine



Shaila Catherine – is founding teacher at Insight Meditation South Bay in Menlo Park, CA. She has been practicing meditation since 1980 (8 years of accumulated silent retreat experience). Shaila has taught since 1996, in the USA and internationally, author of *Focused and Fearless: A Meditator's Guide to States of Deep Joy, Calm, and Clarity* and *Wisdom Wide and Deep: A Practical Handbook for Mastering Jhana and Vipassana* to help make this traditional approach to meditative training accessible to western practitioners.

August 22-26, 2012
 Mercy Center, St Louis, MO
 Fee range: \$530 - \$800



Phil Jones



Phil Jones is the principal teacher in the Way of Silent Mind-Open Heart in Columbia, MO; practiced meditation since 1987; teaching Insight Meditation since 1996. Primary teacher was Matthew Flickstein and studied with teachers from IMS, Spirit Rock, as well as Bhante Gunaratana. Many of his talks and writings can be found at <http://silentmindopenheart.org>.

November 8 – 11, 2012
 Marillac Center, Leavenworth, KS
 Fee range: \$370 - 555

Teachers

Mid America Dharma has offered retreats in the Midwest since the 1990's. For most of this time we've had to import our teachers from the East or West Coasts. This has been a challenge. As these teachers' lives have changed, it's been harder for us to get them on our schedule. Like many of us, their personal lives have become more complicated. Some have become busier with the needs of their own local communities. Air travel has become more unpleasant over the last decade. And some teachers find the small turnouts in the Midwest unappealing.

To reduce road travel for teachers and retreatants and in hopes of increasing turnouts, we've been trying to schedule retreats closer to Kansas City and St. Louis. The trade-off is that these sites are more expensive, which can be a barrier even with a generous scholarship policy. But if people don't attend retreats, teachers will be unwilling to come to us and sites will be reluctant to book us.

We've also been trying to grow local teachers and as their practice experience and teaching skills have developed, we've tried to find some space for them on our schedule. These regional teachers allow us to offer highly effective and inspiring retreats at a lower cost.

In the Theravada Buddhist tradition our teachers are regarded as kalyana mita, spiritual friends. There's an understanding that most of them will still have work to do on the spiritual path. They don't have to be perfect or finished. They just have to be ahead of us on the path. They need to be dedicated to the practice, able to provide us with some safety for this work of inner and outer opening and letting go, and steeped, to some degree, in the teachings of the Buddha. In other words they need to be able to help us find our refuge in awakening and the way things are when we're caught up struggling with our minds, hearts and lives.

Whether our teachers come from far away or nearby, we hope that you'll join us in practicing with them.

Teachers Leading 2013 MAD Retreats

The schedule of retreats and teachers is not entirely established, several nationally renowned teachers have agreed to share the dharma.

Gloria Taraniya Ambrosia is a student of the Western Forest Sangha, the disciples of Ajahn Chah and Ajahn Sumedho; a Lay Buddhist Minister with Abhayagiri Buddhist Monastery; a resident teacher at IMS (1996-1999); and a Core Faculty member at the Barre Center for Buddhist Studies. She has been a Dharma teacher since 1990.

Shaila Catherine is founding teacher at Insight Meditation South Bay in Menlo Park, CA. She has been practicing meditation since 1980 (8 years of accumulated silent retreat experience). Shaila has taught since 1996, in the USA and internationally and authored *Focused and Fearless: A Meditator's Guide to States of Deep Joy, Calm, and Clarity* and *Wisdom Wide and Deep: A Practical Handbook for Mastering Jhana and Vipassana* to help make this traditional approach to meditative training accessible to western practitioners.

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Robert Brumet has practiced Insight Meditation since 1988; leads the Unity Sangha; teaching retreats in North America and the Caribbean since 1995; an ordained Unity minister and professor at Unity School of Theology and author of: *Finding Yourself in Transition*; *The Quest for Wholeness: Healing Ourselves, Healing Our World*; and *Birthing a Greater Reality: A guide to Conscious Evolution*.

Bridget Rolens, MA, OT has practiced Insight Meditation since 1997; she co-leads the St. Louis Insight Meditation Group; completed

Annual Board Meeting, Election of Officers

Mid America Dharma conducted our annual board meeting in January. Our officers were re-elected,

President Jon Yaffe

8 years on Board

Vice President Bridget Rolens

12 years on Board

Secretary Bill Bunn

4 years on Board

Treasurer Phil Jones

16 years on Board

Other Members are:

Joe McCormack

5 years on Board

John Flaherty

18 years on Board

Donna Strickland

5 years on Board

Marnie Hammer

18 years on Board

There have been about a dozen more people on the Mid America Dharma Board over the last 18 years. We have averaged 7 retreats a year, providing the Midwest with opportunities to practice mindfulness.

Join Us on Facebook!

Mid America Dharma has a Facebook page! In an effort to reach more of our Sangha, Mid America Dharma will now be posting retreats and events on Facebook. The page also has a discussion board for issues such as ride sharing and community events. If you have a Facebook account simply type "Mid America Dharma" in your search bar and become a fan of our page. We welcome your comments and questions – feel free to drop us a message now and then!

Matthew Flickstein's "Teaching as a Form of Practice." Her teachers are Ginny Morgan, Matt Flickstein and Gloria "Taraniya" Ambrosia, plus Spirit Rock and IMS; a grounding in Christian contemplative tradition and 12-step recovery; and training in Jon Kabat-Zinn's mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) model

Jon Yaffe began the practice of Insight Meditation in 1999; co-leading meditation retreats and St. Louis Insight Meditation Group since 2006. A student of Matthew Flickstein, he has completed two of his programs: "Teaching as a Form of Practice" and "The Two Year Training".

Joe McCormack has practiced insight meditation since 1995; a Show Me Dharma Teachers Council member; leads an insight meditation group in Jefferson City; teaches insight meditation to prison inmates since 1998 and draws from traditional Theravada Buddhist teachings, Zen, Dzogchen practice, Advaita teachings, the Diamond Approach and is a psychologist. Primary teachers are Ginny Morgan, Phil Jones, and Matthew Flickstein.

October Retreat Cancelled

Have you seen the bumper sticker "Life Happens"? Well, life has happened to Will Kabat-Zinn and to those of us here in the Midwest.

Will along with Joseph Goldstein and Annie Nugent taught our July 2010 retreat. MAD has been trying to build relationships with younger teachers, plus we had so many positive comments about Will, we invited him to return to teach in October of this year.

A few months ago Will and his wife had another child. Babies have a way of changing our lives. Will recently informed us that he would not be able to lead the retreat. He had come to realize that for the sake of his family he needed to curtail his travel at this time. We hope he will be able to join us at some point in the future. In the meantime, we hope you will join us for either our August or November retreats.



Mid America Dharma

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Mid America Dharma Upcoming Retreats

Aug. 22-26, 2012..... Residential Retreat with Shaila Catherine, Saint Louis MO

Nov 8-11, 2012..... Residential Retreat with Phil Jones, Leavenworth, KS

New Year, 2012 – 2013.....Residential Retreat with Robert Brumet, Unity village, MO

For the latest information on retreats and a full listing of Midwestern Buddhist groups please visit our website:
www.midamericadharm.org