



S P R I N G - S U M M E R 2 0 1 3

# Mid America Dharma News

## The Focused Mind – Shaila Catherine

Do you sit down to meditate and find that your attention is quickly swept away by plans, fantasies, and stray thoughts? Are you unable to sustain the focus and interest required to follow projects and tasks through to completion? Do you find it difficult to hold complex problems in mind? These are common expressions of a distracted mind.

Concentration not only supports our proficiency in life, it also brings the consistent happiness and ease that is the expression of a calm, clear mind. The undistracted mind is a bliss filled state. A concentrated mind is focused, unified, and stable, whether the physical and social conditions are uncomfortable or luxurious, pleasant or unpleasant. When you establish a calm abiding during meditation, the mental acuity that results spills over into every aspect of life—academic achievements, creative problem solving, patience in difficult situations, all grow from the power of seeing everything with clarity.

Concentration has many practical benefits, however, the Buddha's teachings are not concerned with improving our productivity at work or making our home lives more comfortable. Instead, he harnessed the potency of the unified mind to transform concentration into a catalyst for spiritual awakening. The Buddhist approach to the development of mind describes how to use concentration to uproot the deep and subtle causes of suffering.

The Pali term, *samadhi*, is usually translated into English as “concentration.” Yet *samadhi* describes something more than the narrow focus of attention

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## Anapanasati: Mindfulness with Breathing In & Out Buddha, Breathing, & Awakening – Santikaro

I am struck with curiosity how little modern Buddhists and teachers refer to the Buddha's own most practical and systematic teaching on meditation — *anapanasati*, mindfulness with breathing in and out. We don't often come across it in all the “how to meditate” books and tapes. Bits and pieces crop up here and there, perhaps, but seldom with the full context, subtlety, and power. Then again, one seldom finds traditional Buddhists mentioning it either. Oh well, expectations are fraught with danger and disappointment. Maybe religion isn't meant to make sense. Digging into origins may be a minority preoccupation.

Still, for me this lacuna appears even curiouser when we realize that this form of meditation is the one the Buddha most often practiced himself, including before, after, and during the Great Awakening. To my mind, the Buddha's own descriptions of what he regularly practiced deserve serious attention and inquiry. After all, *anapanasati* is a “dwelling” he frequented. Fortunately, Ajahn Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, Ven. Thich Nhat Hanh, and others have championed the sutta that lays out this practice and makes it accessible for those looking.

The *Anapanasati Sutta* gives us a roadmap for spiritual cultivation, realization, and liberation. Admittedly, it is more of an outline than a detailed exposition or “how to manual,” but that's the case with all the Pali sutta meditation teachings. The oft referred to *Satipatthana Suttas* (D.22 and M.10) are more lists of

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that is implied by an instruction to “concentrate your attention on an object.” Samadhi refers to a calm unification that occurs when the mind is profoundly undistracted; it is characterized by a profound stillness and stability. The early discourses of the Buddha describe samadhi as “internally steadied, composed, unified, and concentrated.”

There are different types of samadhi. The concentration that develops through a continuity of mindfulness with changing objects is called “momentary concentration” or *khanika samadhi*. Momentary concentration can be very strong during insight meditation practice. With this strong samadhi focused on changing perceptions, the mind will be radiant and experience insight through clearly seeing the rapid arising and perishing of phenomena.

Since 2004, I have emphasized the cultivation of concentration with a fixed focus—*appana samadhi*. Concentration with a fixed focus has the potential to lead to four sublime absorptions called the four *jhanas*. *Jhana* practice develops efficient skills for setting aside habitual distractions, stabilizing attention, and immersing attention in a single coherent focus that brings enduring joy and ease. *Jhanas* are states of profound tranquility that are imbued with a depth of happiness and peace that surpasses any conceivable sensory pleasure. But most importantly, the stability of the concentrated mind is an effective platform for liberating insights.

Blissful states may arise with either practice, but dwelling in blissful states is not the purpose for meditation. The central aim of Buddhist practice is to realize liberating wisdom, which teaches us to let go of the causes of suffering. Without samadhi, we may have a certain degree of insight, but a distracted mind will primarily have insights into the ways it is distracted; our insights remain at a superficial level and usually focus around our personal tendencies. It is very useful to see these tendencies, but deep samadhi as a platform for insight helps us to see reality so much more clearly than is possible for an unstable mind.

Generally I teach mindfulness with breathing as the initial and primary object for concentration. We observe the basic occurrence of breath, rather than the dynamic flow of changing sensations. As concentration deepens, the physicality of changing sensations becomes less dominant and the breath is known as a mental sign, such as a luminous field of perception, called a *nimitta*.

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possible practices categorized according to the four applications of mindfulness than systematic explanation of how to do any of them. (The systems came much later, e.g., in the *Vissuddhimagga*.) Metta is obviously important in the suttas, but you'll search in vain for methods of how to do it, especially as a “meditation.” (These, too, came later.) Yet, the *Anapanasati Sutta* (along with related passages in the *Vinaya* and *Anapanasati-Samyutta*) provide the outline of a complete system of practice, more detailed than any other (except, perhaps, the descriptions of decaying corpses).

Further, this sutta offers a vision of progressive development unfolding through diligent, regular, intelligent, subtle practice rather than force, will-power, or concoctions of thought. This echoes an important theme in some of the more profound early suttas, which Ajahn Buddhadasa speaks of as “Dhamma flows into Dhamma naturally without anyone needing to intend.” We don't make things happen mechanically so much as skillfully cultivate conditions, mindfully avoid distractions and pitfalls, and open to unfolding Buddha seeds. The Buddha's subtlety is evident in how he describes natural processes and how we can interact with them skillfully (not that there is any real distinction between us and the processes), rather than a “getting results” approach focused on attainments. The potentials are always here and need remembering, but right practice requires wise aspiration, not goal oriented desire. Nevertheless, clear direction is crucial and this sutta provides it.

The sutta begins with the Buddha announcing that he will speak at the end of the Rains. This allowed a large number of monks, elders, and teachers to congregate. (Perhaps many nuns were there, too, hidden within the patriarchal language.) The Buddha praised the various realizations and practices within the assembly, then pithily announced that “mindfulness with breathing in and out that one has developed and made much of perfects the four applications of mindfulness ... the seven factors of awakening ... knowledge and liberation.” He then explains how each level of *anapanasati* develops progressively higher, which can be summarized as:

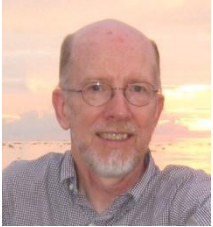
- mindfulness of breathing and related phenomena;
- mindfulness as applications of mindfulness (*satipatthana*);
- mindfulness as factors of awakening (*bojjhanga*);
- mindfulness as true knowledge and liberation
- (*vijja-vimutti*).

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## Mid America Dharma Retreats

### Philip Jones

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**Philip Jones** has practiced meditation since 1987 and has been teaching Insight Meditation since 1996. He has studied with teachers from Spirit Rock and the Insight Meditation Society and graduated from the first Community Dharma Leader program in 2000. He also studied for a number of years with Matthew Flickstein and more recently has been practicing with teachers from IMS. He has served on the board of directors of Mid America Dharma, since the mid-'90's. Many of his talks and writings can be found at <http://silentmindopenheart.org>

July 12–14, 2013 (residential)  
 Mercy Center, St. Louis, MO  
 Fee range: \$250-\$375 Registration opens May 12 and closes June 28.

### Shaila Catherine

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Shaila Catherine has been practicing meditation since 1980, with more than eight years of accumulated silent retreat experience. She has taught since 1996 in the USA, and internationally. Shaila has dedicated several years to studying with masters in India, Nepal and Thailand, completed a one year intensive meditation retreat with the focus on concentration and jhana, and authored [\*Focused and Fearless: A Meditator's Guide to States of Deep Joy, Calm, and Clarity\*](#), (Wisdom Publications, 2008). She has extensive experience with the practice of metta, including seven months exploring metta as the meditation subject in retreats. In recent years, Shaila had continued her [study](#) of jhana and insight with the guidance of Venerable Pa-Auk Sayadaw of Burma.

September 18–22, 2013 (residential)  
 Lake Doniphan Center, Kansas City, MO  
 Fee range: \$400 - \$800 Registration opens June 18 and close September 14

### Santikaro

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**Santikaro** was ordained in Thailand as a Theravada monk in 1985, and subsequently trained at Suan Mokkh with Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, a leading Thai teacher, scholar, and reformer of Theravada Buddhism. He lived in Thailand as a Buddhist monk for 16 years. He became Ajahn Buddhadasa's primary English translator and was abbot of nearby Suan Atammayatarama. In 2004 he returned to lay life. He continues to teach in the Buddhist tradition with an emphasis on the early Pali sources. He is the founder of Liberation Park, a modern American expression of Buddhist practice, study, and social responsibility within community.

Oct 18 –20, 2013, (non-residential)  
 Maria Center, St Louis MO  
 Fee range: \$60-\$90, Registration opens July 18 and closes October 4.

## Joe McCormack &amp; Tonda March-----



**Joe McCormack** has practiced insight meditation since 1995. He has been a member of the Show Me Dharma Teachers Council since 2002. Joe leads an insight meditation group in Jefferson City, and has taught insight meditation to prison inmates since 1998. His teachers include Ginny Morgan, Phil Jones, and Matthew Flickstein. In January 2008, he completed the Community Dharma Leader training program through Spirit Rock Meditation Center. In his dharma instruction, Joe draws from traditional Theravada Buddhist teachings, Zen and Dzogchen practice, Advaita teachings, and the Diamond Approach. He is also trained as a psychologist and practices psychotherapy in Jefferson City.



**Tonda March** has been practicing meditation since the early nineties. She has been influenced by the wisdom of several Western Theravadan teachers, including Ginny Morgan, Carol Wilson, Gregory Kramer, and Thanissara. Month-long self-retreats at Forest Refuge and participation in Spirit Rock's Community Dharma Leaders training program have helped her practice unfold.

November 9 –10, 2013, (non-residential)

Columbia College, Columbia, MO

Fee range: \$60 - \$90, Registration opens August 9 and closes October 26.

We are sad to report that we will not be able to offer a retreat with **Shinzen** for the next several years. He has informed us that due to other commitments he will not be able to return to lead a retreat until after 2015. If you want more information about Shinzen's schedule in the meantime, please check <http://www.shinzen.org>.

## Retreat Registration

**INSIGHT MEDITATION:** offers an easily accessible way to free the mind from the distortions of self-centeredness, negativity and confusion. Through concentrated awareness, we see that our experience is a constantly changing process, in which all aspects of life are accepted with increasing balance and equanimity. This insight leads to the possibility of living each moment fully, with compassion and genuine freedom. Insight Meditation requires no belief commitments and is compatible with religious affiliations. Unless specified, no previous meditation experience is required.

**RETREAT FORMAT:** Periods of sitting meditation and/or dharma teachings alternate with walking meditation. Retreats are held in silence, with talking only during specified teaching periods. Beginners should be present from the start of the retreat to receive initial instructions.

Please bring a meditation cushion or bench and a soft floor pad for meditation. Standard chairs are available and may also be used. Wear comfortable, loose fitting clothes. Please do not wear or bring strongly scented lotions, perfumes or incense.

**Residential retreats** begin with check-in at 4 pm on the first day and run through lunch on the last day. Participants are guided through group or private interviews and daily general lectures. Meals are plain vegetarian. A tea table is provided.

**REGISTRATION:** Information about retreat site, starting times, etc., is available online or will be sent after you register.

**FEES:** Retreat costs are listed on the registration form below.

**Sliding Scale:** Each retreat cost is listed as a range. The lowest fee listed is the base cost of providing the retreat for each retreatant. Any amount paid above that will be a tax-deductible contribution used to defray retreat expenses, scholarships and other activities.

**Residential:** a minimum deposit of \$75 must accompany registration; full payment is due at the start of the retreat.

**Non-residential retreats:** please pay the full fee when you register.

**Registration Opening Dates and Deadlines:** ... are listed on the preceding page. Registrations are not accepted prior to the beginning date for each retreat. Registrations received after the deadline are subject to a \$25 late fee.

**Refunds:** We will refund fees if requested before the deadline.

**Scholarships:** We do not want inability to pay to prevent you from attending, and have established a scholarship fund to provide assistance where needed. Deferred payment is also available. You can read about and apply for assistance when registering via any of our retreat websites or the registrar can mail you written materials. Applications must be received by the Registrar no later than three weeks prior to the retreat

**DANA (or generosity):** Our retreats are led by teachers who freely give the teachings without any payment. All retreat fees go for retreat expenses, such as facility rental and meals. It is central to this tradition that students support teachers through their donations. There is no expected amount, but please give to the extent you are able. Dana is completely voluntary

## Retreat Registration Form

Please register online at [www.midamericadharm.org/retreats](http://www.midamericadharm.org/retreats).

To register via USPS please send this form with a check payable to Mid America Dharma, c/o Jon Yaffe, 3222 Walter Avenue, Maplewood, MO 63143. If registering for multiple retreats, please send a separate copy of this form with payment to the registrar for each retreat. A \$75 deposit is required for all residential retreats. Please register as early as you can, as this greatly helps our planning.

\_\_\_\_\_ July 12 – 14, 2013      **Fee Amount** \_\_\_\_\_  
Philip Jones, Residential,  
Mercy Center, St. Louis, MO  
Fee range: \$250 - \$375

\_\_\_\_\_ September 18–22, 2013      **Fee Amount** \_\_\_\_\_  
Shaïla Catherine, Residential,  
Lake Doniphan Center, Kansas City, MO  
Fee Range: **\$540-\$800 (single)**  
**\$400-\$600 (double)**

\_\_\_\_\_ October 18 – 20, 2013      **Fee Amount** \_\_\_\_\_  
Santikaro, Non-residential,  
Maria Center, St Louis, MO  
Fee Range: \$60-\$90

\_\_\_\_\_ November 9-10, 2013      **Fee Amount** \_\_\_\_\_  
Joe McCormack & Tonda March, Non-residential  
Columbia College, Columbia, MO  
Fee Range: \$60-\$90

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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E-Mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_

For Residential Retreatants only:

Gender:            F            M

Will you arrive after 7pm on the first day?    Y            N

Is this your first insight meditation retreat?   Y            N

Do you snore?    Y            N

If you have special needs, please contact the registrar:  
Jon Yaffe ([gjyaffe@sbcglobal.net](mailto:gjyaffe@sbcglobal.net)) or (314-266-1922)

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When the nimitta is stable, jhana becomes readily accessible.

Several conditions must come together for absorption to occur. The mind must be calm and virtually thought-free. Defilements and hindrances such as aversion, desire, restlessness, and doubt will have ceased arising. The wholesome faculties of faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom will be strong. And the five jhana factors must be well developed and refined—initial application of the mind, sustained attention, rapture, happiness, and one-pointedness. As concentration develops, the mind gradually withdraws from its preoccupation with the sensory world, all thought ceases except the singular concern with the meditation subject (such as the breath nimitta), and the mind grows increasingly bright and settled. When conditions ripen, the mind may release into a stable experience of absorption.

In jhana, attention is entirely occupied with its meditation object. Jhana can be sustained for very long periods of time, because sounds, sensations, hindrances, or pain will not disrupt the one-pointed attention. Although this depth of detachment is often challenging to attain, once seclusion is established, the sequential development through the four stages of jhana unfolds rather effortlessly. The hard part is establishing the conditions for the first jhana—after that it is clear sailing. Having taught jhana practice now for over eight years, I have found that the single most important technique for students to learn is skillful effort. Jhana requires a nuanced application of effort—the integrity of complete resolve combined with total ease. It is a state of deep relaxation and letting go—it is as though the mind rests into its meditation object—and simultaneously it requires clear determination and intention

Some meditators come to a retreat well prepared and even a retreat as short as ten days is enough to open to these states. Most people, however, need more time to cultivate the conditions and the skills required for a genuine taste of absorption. It does not matter whether students attain jhana on a ten day retreat. I teach these practices because I know that it is important to develop concentration. By cultivating concentration we clarify

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Throughout, sati is grounded in breathing in and out. With this wonderful anchor, mind is refined, explored, realized, and liberated — all while breathing in and out. We start with awareness of a simple bodily process and nurturingly follow the unfolding as far as we are able, potentially to the highest realization.

Mere mindfulness of breathing is insufficient for the full unfolding of our lives. One must be mindful of and investigate more subtle realities of mind and Dhamma, including voidness and Nibbana itself. Still, the breathing is a fine foundation for all of that, as well as haven, rejuvenator, and anchor. Just learning the ins and outs of healthy breathing is worth the daily effort.

Through firmly establishing sati in the breathing, the applications of mindfulness develop. The breathing is an entry into body-satipatthana. The joy of being calmly grounded in the breathing is an entry into feeling-satipatthana. The minds that experience various phenomena connected with breathing are a good entry into mind-satipatthana. Finally, awareness of the breathing's impermanence is a direct entry into Dhamma-satipatthana, that is, real vipassana.

Once able to practice on the level of satipatthana, sati is developed to the level of bojjangha (factors of awakening). Not just mindful of something as some “thing” with its own little story, sati as bojjangha includes more basic levels of mindfulness and further is “based upon solitude, fading away, and quenching, and matures in release.” These terms describe “states” (dhammas) closely associated with the highest stages of realization and with Nibbana. Mindfulness and samadhi are homing in on the end of suffering. This natural unfolding culminates in true knowledge and liberation (vijja-vimutti), which are synonymous with full and final awakening. Therein, sati and vipassana are perfected. You won't find a better description of this anywhere else in the suttas. Our highest aspiration is modeled by the Buddha and his teaching of the Anapanasati Sutta invites us to follow in his footsteps

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our aim, develop skillful effort, learn to overcome restlessness and obstructions, nurture letting go and relinquishment, and intensify a host of wholesome states. It is a worthy training that has great value whether or not the student sustains it long enough to experience the particular four jhanas. I recommend that students let go of the expectation for certain experiences, and simply cultivate concentration as a means of developing the mind. See what there is to learn through enhancing focused attention—jhana may be accessible, or it may not in the conditions of a particular retreat

Traditionally jhana practice was not reserved for special people, or restricted to the monastic order. During the Buddha's day, lay disciples and busy merchants would, from time to time, enjoy the benefits and joys of jhanic abiding. In an effort to encourage the cultivation of concentration in daily life, and help make the traditional practices of jhana as a basis for insight accessible to western meditators, I wrote two books—*Focused and Fearless* and *Wisdom Wide and Deep*—and I lead retreats that emphasize concentration (and jhana) in the context of insight. If you'd like to strengthen your concentration, don't wait until you are in retreat. A daily meditation practice, of any length, can bring great fruits in concentration and wisdom

*The following article was originally published by in the Insight Meditation South Bay e-newsletter volume 8, October 2012.*

Links to books by Shaila Catherine:

<http://www.imsb.org/books/ff.php>

<http://www.imsb.org/books/wwd.php>



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This practice may not suit everyone. The Buddha admitted diversity and personal discernment in such matters, and we are encouraged to find what truly works best for each of us. Nonetheless, we do well to recognize that anapanasati suited the Buddha and many leading disciples quite well. It may just as well suit those of us who seek the same wisdom, realization, freedom, and coolness the Buddha found.

Ajahn Buddhadasa's detailed discussion of the sutta, along with a translation, is published as *Mindfulness with Breathing: a manual for serious beginners* (Wisdom, 1988).

*Written for Grassroots Dhamma, the newsletter of the Twin Cities Vipassana Cooperative*

<http://www.liberationpark.org/medit/grassroots1.htm>

## 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!

# Mid America Dharma

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## Mid America Dharma Upcoming Retreats

- July 12-14, 2013.....Residential Retreat **Philip Jones**, St. Louis, MO  
Sept 18-22, 2013.....Residential retreat **Shaila Catherine**, Lake Doniphan Center, Kansas City, MO  
Oct. 18-20, 2013.....Non-Residential Retreat **Santikaro**, St. Louis, MO  
Nov. 9-10, 2013..... Non-Residential Retreat **Joe McCormack &Tonda March**, Columbia, MO

*For the latest information on retreats and a full listing of Midwestern Buddhist groups please visit our website:*  
[www.midamericadharm.org](http://www.midamericadharm.org)