



Spring 2009

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As spring turns to summer it's time to have another newsletter. Our newsletters take a little while to produce as 90% of the work is done by one person who has a few other things to do ... If you would like to be involved in producing a newsletter, do get in touch by emailing to the address at the bottom.

News and Reports

Report from Women's long retreat

by Angela Riley.

Angela's Reflections on Women's Long Retreat:

Celebrating the Life and Legacy of Milarepa - The Joyful Yogi! Given my recent decision to become a mitra, attending my first-ever long retreat was an opportunity not to be missed. The chosen theme for the retreat was exploring the life and teachings of Milarepa, a highly revered Tibetan spiritual master of the sixteenth century who resided for the most part of his spiritual career in high-altitude-solitude within a rocky cave of a Tibetan mountain. Milarepa communicated his teachings to his disciples predominantly through songs - joyful, heartfelt, playful songs replete with wisdom and truths of the Dharma, and the first half of the retreat was spent examining the pith of some of these (if you have the time I highly recommend reading some passages from Sangharakshita's *The Yogi's Joy - Songs of Milarepa*). What I really took from this retreat was a kickstart to establishing a regular meditation practice, something I have really struggled to implement into my life this last year. On this retreat, approximately three hours per day (not taken all at once but spread throughout) was dedicated to meditation - mindfulness of breathing; metta bhavana; walking and guided. The first few days were difficult. As my body gave way to excessive fidgeting and phantom back/neck pains I didn't know existed, the busy fuzz of my over-stimulating life here in Melbourne echoed through each sit. There were many times during these first few days, had I not been on retreat, I believe I would have given up out of sheer frustration, cut my meditation short and dared not venture towards the cushion again for at least another two days. But here, in this space, it was different, and this was my first of many glimpses I would have over the next week into the transformative power of being on retreat. I think there were two things that really helped me - firstly, sangha. Being amongst others everyday who are equally committed to meditation gave me strength and inspiration. It wasn't just the opportunity to debrief with people after a frustrating sit, be given endless positive encouragement and tips on techniques to manage your hindrances. While these were undoubtedly beneficial, there was something more subtle and profound I took from meditating in a circle (or line as we walked) of spiritual friends. The only analogy I can ascribe this to is swimming laps in a pool. Sometimes the person in the lane next to me propels forward at such speed, that for a few moments my body enters the slipstream of their motion and I gain added momentum in the water without effort on my own part. And so with meditating on retreat, knowing the intention and commitment of all those around me, to meditate in order to cultivate a positive state of mind for the benefit of all sentient beings, inspired me deeply and as such propelled me forward a little bit more each day. Obviously meditation isn't physical like swimming and one can't capture the slipstream effect through contraction and



expansion of a person's lungs breathing next to you on a cushion the way you can in a pool when they are kicking and splashing about, but I'm speaking more here about a slipstream of 'energy' - as vague and fluffy as that sounds (sorry!), from others around you, and words always being insufficient to direct experience itself, this is something you will just have to test' for yourself by going on a retreat to really understand what on earth I could possibly be talking about. The second benefit of retreat to my meditation practice was the opportunity to develop shraddha, the Pali word meaning heartfelt confidence or faith - believing in something not because you have been told and you simply nod and accept as true without question, but because you have heard, you have reflected, you have put into practice and finally you have experienced for yourself the effects of that truth with your whole being. This shraddha into the wisdom and compassion to be attained from regular meditation seems to be an almost inevitable side-effect of going on a long retreat. The daily structure of multiple meditations imposed an inescapable consistency to my meditation practice that I could not avoid noticing the effects of how I was indeed changing my mind with my own mind. Some of these effects included: a greatly improved concentration (this became evident after only two days), ability to stay completely focused when listening to others, a deeper reservoir of compassion and loving-kindness that poured towards people with greater ease, more energy, less fatigue, and sharper recall of dreams. Coming home at the end, I felt like a different person re-entering the world. And after experiencing all of this, how could I not be inspired to keep up my meditations? Now, before I meditate, if I am feeling lacklustre and unclear about my intentions, I reminisce about this time on retreat and my doubts dissipate. There is so much more I could say about how special this retreat was for me, but my parting words of advice for any budding Buddhist like myself eager to deepen their spiritual practice - JUST GO! It's the best holiday you could ever give to yourself. Thank you so much to Gambhiraja, Sudaya and Shantidevi for organising the retreat, it was really one of the most nourishing, relaxing ten days I have ever experienced and I promise next time to make sure I cook the onions properly! Angela

We thank the many people from the Melbourne Buddhist Centre who once again supported the Melbourne Buddhist Film Festival. It was a great pleasure to see so many familiar faces at ACMI and to hear that you appreciated the films and other events.

We had a more documentary-focused selection of films this year, including the outstanding *Amongst White Clouds*, which journeyed to China's Zhongnan Mountains to interview hermit monks and nuns practising intensively towards Enlightenment, and the inspiring *Dhamma Brothers*, which recounted the experiment of taking an intensive meditation course into Alabama's Donaldson Correctional Facility. *Meditate and Destroy* was a joy: it introduced former addict Noah Levine, now recovered and creatively combining Dharma teachings with AA approaches to help young, at-risk people. A large audience attended the bright and revealing documentary *The Devotion*, exploring the life of Matthieu Ricard and his work translating Buddhist teachings and fundraising for social causes. *Wheel of Time*, the Werner Herzog documentary about the Dalai Lama's visit to Bodhi Gaya, and *The Book of the Dead*, an extraordinary stop-motion feature about the Nara period of Buddhism in Japan, completed the film program. Filmgoers were also able to attend a talk by the Venerable Phuoc Tan about mudras, and a tea ceremony presented by the Urasenke Association.

Proceeds from the festival go to the Buddhist Council of Victoria's schools and prisons programs, and festival organisers particularly hope that the interest shown at the festival will assist the prisons program to expand. Planning for next year's festival will begin early in 2010; if you are interested in being involved, or have any suggestions, please let us know. It's a great opportunity for Buddhists from different centres to mix and understand the work of the Buddhist Council of Victoria.

- MBFF organisers: John Fleming, Siladasa, Rachael Wass, Linda Marret, Diane Cook and Rosemary Moore

Poem

The Unseen Flower

Compassion is far more than emotion.

It is something that springs

Up in the emptiness which is when you yourself are not there,

So that you do not know anything about it.

Nobody, in fact, knows anything about it

(If they knew it, it would not be Compassion);

But they can only smell

The scent of the unseen flower

That blooms in the Heart of the Void.

Sangharakshita from *Complete Poems 1941/1994* (Windhorse Books 1995)



Coming Soon

Our 2010 programme of events is being produced now. Check the website soon to see our calendar of courses, retreats and seminars for next year.

There will be an open day retreat on December 31. Now in its third year, this day is an excellent way to reflect on the turning of the year. We will also have our annual New Years Eve event that evening. More details will appear on the website soon.

Starting in February 2010 there will be a change to regulars evening. It will be on Thursday evenings at 7.30pm, along with the newcomer's drop-in meditation evening. This will leave Wednesday evenings free for running our courses. Buddhism and meditation courses will no longer be on Tuesday and Thursday evenings, they will both run on Wednesday evenings.

Dharma Quote

"You can only lead a simple life if you remember what life is really for. The purpose of simplicity is not to let the business of living get in the way of the things that are of importance."

Sangharakshita quoted in *Peace is a Fire* (Windhorse Publications, 1995)

Send any news items or images you can offer to news@melbournebuddhistcentre.org for inclusion in the next newsletter.

Don't forget to [visit our website](#).

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