



## Mindfulness-Meditation-Serenity

By Debra Greenfield

Volume Two - May 2014

Welcome dear "Friends on The Path",

I'm so happy to bring this edition of our newsletter to you! We've had an exciting start to our second year, full of the promise of growth and motivated to bring this healing path to all beings recovering from addictive behaviors, (which is pretty much everyone who has taken up this human existence!) Many of you are currently attending Buddhist recovery groups in and around Seattle, so I wanted to talk a little bit about what we hope to be bringing to those who attend.

**Mindfulness:** The most important aspect of the path of Buddhist recovery is developing our mindfulness. With mindfulness meditation practice, we learn to be aware of our feelings, especially craving or desire, and develop the ability to be with them without pushing them down, medicating them or denying they exist. We also seek to practice more ethical behavior by being mindful of how we show up in the world, cultivating an attitude on non-harming in our words and deeds. By reciting the five Buddhist precepts every day, I was reminded in my early recovery that my actions out in the world created either positive or negative Karmic consequences. By behaving in a kind and compassionate manner I started to draw into my life more kind and compassionate people who would be mentors for me and help me to develop new, healthier relationships. Compassion for myself allowed me to gently let go of the relationships and people who cultivated harmful, destructive patterns in my life that were keeping me from being happy as a sober person.

In the foreword to the book "Breath by Breath" by Larry Rosenberg, Jon Kabat-Zinn writes, "The cultivation of mindfulness is ultimately a matter of life and death, not in a scary way, but in the sense that we are always at risk, in every moment, for missing what is deepest and richest in our lives, the texture of the tapestry itself. We might say (every pun intended) that the richness lies right beneath our noses in any and every moment."

**Meditation:** Developing a regular meditation practice is the main focus of most Buddhist recovery support groups. Meditating together at the beginning of a meeting can create a wonderful sense of connection and bonding within the group. While we typically do not offer meditation teachings, we practice simple mindfulness of the breath to help practitioners develop their concentration and awareness of feelings as impermanent mental constructions. Through resources we have gathered on our website, facilitators can further guide those interested in deepening their meditation practice, finding teachers and classes in our area, as well as additional meditation groups to sit with.

As simple as mindfulness of the breath is, it is an important beginning to unlocking the benefits of meditation to a recovering addict. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu spoke about the importance of this simple practice in his booklet "Mindfulness of Breathing – Getting Started", "May you train with these first steps in order to be fully equipped with *Sila* (virtue), *Samadhi* (concentration) and *Panna* (wisdom), that is, to be fully grounded in the noble eightfold path. Even if only a start, this is better than not going anywhere."

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*The Buddha taming Nalagiri  
with Metta from the  
Buddhajayamangalagatha*



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**Serenity:** On my *personal* journey on the Buddhist path, I took refuge in the Triple Gem. The Buddha (as my role model for ethical behavior), the Dharma (the teachings of the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path) and the traditional Bhikkhu Sangha (those monastics who devoted their practice to the study and transmission of that Dharma). I also found noble friends, or Kalyana Mitta to support me on this path, and these all served as my “higher power”. In leaving behind my reluctant recovery, I became committed to the Buddhist path of morality. Taking the vows of the Five Precepts, studying the Noble Eightfold Path, being of service to others and practicing non-harming in all of my actions, I no longer willingly engage in behaviors that bring suffering to myself or others. This cultivates peace of mind, knowing that I can move forward on this path with a lighter heart, and end the cycle of shame, blame and regret that was fed by my addictive behaviors.

In the handbook “The Four Sublime States” by Nyanapoika Thera, the author speaks of equanimity, or what I experience as serenity – “By looking at our suffering as our teacher and friend, we shall better succeed in enduring it with equanimity. Consequently, the teaching of Kamma (Karma) will give us a powerful impulse to free ourselves from Kamma, from those deeds which again and again throw us into the suffering of repeated births. Disgust will arise at our own craving, at our own delusion, at our own propensity to create situations which try our strength, our resistance and our equanimity.”

*Debra Greenfield is the founder of “Northwest Buddhist Recovery”, a Buddhist recovery meeting facilitator and student of Buddhism and meditation. Her own personal recovery experience fuels her passion to bring this path to others suffering from the dis-ease of addictive behavior.*



## WINTER EVENTS January-March

### January 2014

Our second year started with the publication of the first NWBR newsletter. It included information about our organization, a recap of events from 2013, meeting highlights, book reviews and news about Dharma teachers across the globe speaking about the benefits of Buddhist Recovery. While originally intended for meeting facilitators we realized it was of interest to our whole community, and I look forward to continuing publication each quarter for the rest of the year. Look for editions on-line and at NWBR meetings.



**February 15th** - This month we sponsored a half day Introduction to Vipassana meditation workshop with Ven. Santidhammo of the Wat Atammayarama Buddhist Monastery in Woodinville, WA. Ven. Santi provided basic skills that practitioners could use in their Buddhist recovery meetings, and answered meditation questions. Because of the positive feedback from participants, we plan on making these workshops a regular event.

**March 15<sup>th</sup>** – This was collaboration in bringing Ven. Thay Kobai Scott-Whitney of the Plum Mountain Buddhist Community to lead a “Day of Mindful Recovery” as a guest of Ven.Santidhammo and the Wat Atamma temple community. Thay



Kobai used 12 step recovery support tools along with Buddhist meditation and Dharma (as well as some Tai Chi movements) to help us blend our recovery and Buddhist practice. The potluck lunch and meetings before and after the retreat provided a unique perspective on the usual meditation day retreat format.



## Buddhist Recovery Around the World

### Vince Cullen - West Berkshire, UK

I was intrigued by the idea of attending a “virtual” Buddhist recovery meeting on-line, so after navigating the user friendly instructions from Vince’s **Fifth Precept Sangha** website, [www.5th-precept.org](http://www.5th-precept.org) I found myself sitting with a group from the U.K., Ireland and me in America, meditating together and discussing our various backgrounds in Buddhist practice and addiction recovery. Vince was warm and funny, creating an atmosphere of lightness and peace with his meditation instruction and skillfully leading the meeting to create the feeling of a live recovery Sangha. It was an amazing experience, and a wonderful introduction to Buddhist Recovery meetings for those who are curious but may not want to commit to a meeting until they check it out. Even the meditation was a positive experience, after letting go of the technical hurdles that I had to overcome to set it up.



Going back a week or so, I met Vince Cullen on Skype after corresponding with him for over a year over emails and facebook posts. . I had been navigating the web, searching for Buddhist treatment programs and discovered a website for Wat Thamkrabok in Thailand, a unique temple that offers a detox and treatment régime that is controversial and very effective. Vince has a long history with the temple program, having first visited Thailand in November 1998 to see the process and meet with the first abbot of Thamkrabok - Luangpor Chamroon Pamchand . Two years later Vince escorted a crack addict to the temple for detox treatment, then again with a methadone addict in July 2002 . In 2003, Vince ordained, for the first time, as a novice Thamkrabok monk , where he spent most of his time working with other addicts and alcoholics in the temple’s treatment

compound. During this time he was invited by the second Abbot, Luangpor Charoen Pamchand to “use computers to help prepare addicts for treatment at Thamkrabok”. Vince set up the “**Thamkrabok Monastery Independent Information Network**” website [www.thamkrabok.net](http://www.thamkrabok.net) to “inform, prepare and help those people truly seeking an end to their addictions for their journey to Thailand.” At that time, he also established the **TARA Detox Organization** [www.tara-detox.org](http://www.tara-detox.org) to help addicts access the Thamkrabok treatment program, and over the years has escorted many people seeking recovery to the monastery. He also established the “**Friends of Thamkrabok monastery**” on-line support group to support graduates of the Thamkrabok treatment program.

### The “Sajja Vow”

At the heart of the Thamkrabok treatment program is the “**Sajja Vow**”, a commitment to abandon alcohol and other drugs. Rooted in the last of the five Buddhist precepts taken by individuals who wish to lead an ethical and moral life; the fifth precept is the intention to abstain from intoxicants which can cause heedlessness. Taken a step further, the “**Sajja Vow**” holds a tremendous power; it is an act that recognizes the power of stating “these words of Truth” i.e. your intention to completely abstain from intoxicants, stated in front of your recovery community, or the Monks at the Thamkrabok temple, or your sponsor; or even by yourself in a private ceremony with just the Natural Elements as your witness. The subsequent support of your Buddhist practice of the Noble Eightfold path and keeping company with your peers in Buddhist recovery has proven to be a viable path of recovery from addictive behaviors for a growing number of people across the world.

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### **The Fifth Precept Sangha and ‘Sit-and-Share’ recovery meetings**

Immediately following the inaugural **Buddhist Recovery Network** conference held in Los Angeles in October 2009, Vince extended his support individuals looking for a Buddhist-oriented approach to recovery. The **Fifth Precept Sangha** meditates together and shares the challenges and successes they experience living without intoxicants in **‘Sit-and-Share’** meditation recovery groups. These groups are open to anyone in recovery from alcohol or other drug addictions with any or no Buddhist practice or meditation training. Similar to other Buddhist Recovery groups now found around the world, the **Fifth Precept Sangha** supports its practitioners in living a more wholesome and ethical life through meditation practice and the application of basic Buddhist teachings described as “the Foundations of a Buddhist Path of Recovery”. Instructions for starting a Buddhist recovery meeting using the **Fifth Precept Sangha ‘Sit-and-Share’** format can be found on the website, with all of the information and study materials needed to facilitate your own **‘Sit-and-Share’** Sangha. Access to the “virtual” **Fifth Precept Sangha ‘Sit-and-Share’** meeting, which is held on Tuesdays at 7:45pm (UK time) can also be found on the website [www.5th-precept.org](http://www.5th-precept.org). Go the home page and click on the **‘Sit-and-Share’** tab to find instructions for the virtual meeting.

### **Hungry Ghost Recovery Retreats**

In 2011, Vince furthered his commitment to developing and promoting a wholly Buddhist-oriented path of recovery when he offered the inaugural **‘From Hungry Ghost to Being Human’** recovery retreat at **The Barn Buddhist Retreat Centre** in Devon, England.

These 5-day workshops are an opportunity to explore some of the principles and practices of the Fifth Precept Sangha’s approach to addiction recovery, harm reduction and relapse prevention within a formal retreat setting. Vince has now taught these retreats in England, Scotland, Ireland and Thailand. For more details see – [www.HungryGhostRetreats.org](http://www.HungryGhostRetreats.org) , The handout for these retreats can be downloaded from [www.5th-precept.org/html/downloads.html](http://www.5th-precept.org/html/downloads.html) These retreats are open to all, including those who wouldn’t necessarily consider themselves to be addicts. As Vince says, “Everyone is in recovery; recovery from greed, hatred and delusion; recovery from craving, aversion and confusion. Learning to cultivate a little self-kindness and self-forgiveness can go a very, very long way in the healing process.”

### **ABOUT VINCE**

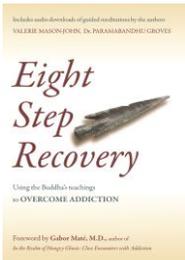
Vince Cullen considers himself a “recovered alcoholic” who has been associated with the Wat Thamkrabok temple in Thailand and Buddhist-oriented drug and alcohol recovery since 1998. Vince facilitates the Fifth Precept Sangha meditation-for-recovery group in West Berkshire (UK) and is a charter member of the Buddhist Recovery Network. In 2012, Vince completed the Committed Dhamma Practitioners Programme (CDPP) run by Gaia House in Devon, England. He is the part-time Buddhist Chaplain at H.M. Prison Coldingley (Men) and visiting Buddhist Chaplain at H.M. Prison Send (Women); through the auspices of Angulimala, the Buddhist Prison Chaplaincy. Both prisons are located in Surrey, England.

Vince offers Hungry Ghost Retreats worldwide.





## BOOK REVIEW



### **Eight Step Recovery- Using the Buddha's Teachings to Overcome Addiction by Valerie Mason John and Dr. Paramabandu Groves**

In their new book, Valerie (aka Vimalasara) and Dr. Paramabandu have combined their backgrounds in Buddhist studies, addiction counseling and psychology to provide us with a refreshing new look at eight steps we can take on a road to recovery from addiction. This book takes us through these steps one by one, beginning with the acknowledgement of our suffering and ending, (much like another step program) with being of service to others. Along with explanations of each step, the authors share Buddhist teachings as related to that particular step, along with meditations and reflections to help us bring these teachings into our hearts and fully embrace them as tools on our recovery path. The first four steps relate to the “Four Noble Truths” as taught by the Buddha, which are regularly referred to in Buddhist Recovery meetings as they relate to addiction. First we recognize suffering (as addiction). Secondly, we see that there is a cause of our suffering. Third is that there is a path we can follow to lessen suffering, and the fourth step is to follow “The Noble Eightfold Path” as taught by the Buddha. This book takes these and other Buddhist teachings to create an “Eightfold Path” that can be used by anyone in recovery from addiction or trauma to help them take control of their unwholesome habit patterns.

This book will be featured on our website [www.nwbuddhistrecovery.org](http://www.nwbuddhistrecovery.org) in May and June as part of our on-line summer fundraising event. Also, mark your calendar for Vimalasara’s visit to Seattle on August 15<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> for NWBR sponsored events. **Check our website for more details to come**



## MEETING HIGHLIGHT



### **“Dharma Sunday” Group**

**Venue:** Shoreline Unitarian Universalist Church  
**Time:** \*2:00pm – 3:30pm  
(\*changing in the summer)

**Contact:** Pam– [pugetdelight@gmail.com](mailto:pugetdelight@gmail.com)

After the services are over, the campus of this lovely church nestled in a wooded area of Shoreline is quiet and peaceful. It’s a little confusing coming into the parking lot, as there are two church driveways side by side, and there is not a lot of signage guiding you to the meeting. As you pull in the driveway, look for the second building on the right with the handicapped ramp and enter through the left door.

One of the newer meetings in Seattle, this group has come together to form a close knit and caring community, supporting each other in their recovery and studying Buddhist teachings from traditional as well as Western Dharma teachers and authors. The group is peer led, the facilitator of the day having previously signed up to lead the meeting for that particular day. The format is consistent and flows well, and each peer facilitator brings their own personality with their choice of reading and their own share. The meeting coordinators do a great job of providing materials on upcoming events, interesting articles and sometimes books for the participants. The last meeting of each month is followed by a business meeting which is open to anyone.

If you plan on attending, be aware that in the summer the meeting time will be changing to the evening, to accommodate those who want to enjoy their sunny Sunday afternoons.



## NWBR BUSINESS NEWS

March was an exciting month for us, with the arrival of our official “**Articles of Incorporation**” certificate from the state of Washington. With this and our **EIN #** all taken care of, we are well on our way to our goal of 501c3 status in 2015.

Some of our Buddhist recovery groups have been making regular donations to the “mother ship” to help support future events, and we have been able to take donations on our website through PayPal. In February we received a \$330.00 donation which funded our AOI application, Northwest Dharma Association membership and two events that were very successful. We are currently working on ideas for fundraisers to help us toward our goal of being a 501c3 by next year, when we will be able to apply for grants to continue our growth.

In other news, we have a new volunteer on our website team, working with our webmaster as our content developer and tech support person. With her help, we will make many changes to the website in the next couple of months, hopefully creating a more fun and user friendly site. The newest addition is the “Twitter” feed on our homepage, so now you can follow us on Twitter! I’m excited to “tweet” cool new resources and information about Buddhist Recovery and upcoming events that I find on my travels through cyberspace!

We still need volunteers to come and join our team as we grow and expand. I am hopeful that the perfect people are reading this right now, and will want to come and join us on this exciting and worthwhile journey!

We are currently in (desperate) need of a treasurer and marketing and promotion support. Please contact me directly at [nwbuddhistrecovery@gmail.com](mailto:nwbuddhistrecovery@gmail.com) if you would like more details about this position.

## SUMMER EVENTS

**April 5<sup>th</sup> 2pm-6pm Introduction to Vipassana**  
Half day meditation workshop with Ven. Santidhammo  
at Seattle Area Support Group Community Center

**May 1<sup>st</sup> through June 1<sup>st</sup> – NWBR Fundraiser** Pre-orders will be taken on our website for newly published Buddhist recovery books by several well-known Buddhist authors, and traditional Buddhist prayer malas by Sombu Spirit. A portion of all sales will go to raise funds for our 501c3 non-profit application.

**June (Date TBD) -Working with our Emotions**  
A workshop for women with Tuere Sala of the *Seattle Insight Meditation Society*. This will be our first workshop specifically for women in recovery from addiction or trauma using Buddhist practice and meditation techniques. Event details will be posted on our website as they become available.

Please go to [www.nwbuddhistrecovery.org](http://www.nwbuddhistrecovery.org) for more information or to register for an event, and follow us on TWITTER for NWBR updates and other events of interest to our Buddhist Recovery Community.

**NWBR is dedicated to the Buddhist practice of DANA. While all of our events are free, we accept donations in any amount from those who can afford it, to allow those with financial challenges access to the Dharma and support on their recovery path. Donations can be made on our website using PayPal.**

“As a deep lake is clear and undisturbed,  
so a Sage becomes clear upon hearing the  
Dharma”

Verse 82 Dhammapada Translated by Gil Fronsdal

