

An Introduction to The Mindfulness Community of Milwaukee

A Buddhist sangha in the tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh

The Mindfulness Community of Milwaukee is a spiritual community dedicated to the creation of a mindful culture fostering loving kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity. We study and practice teachings from Buddhism and other traditions in order to nurture individuals, families, society, and a healthy planet.

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The Sangha

We are a sangha: A community of followers of the teachings of the Buddha and other great spiritual leaders. We practice and study primarily in the tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh. To participate, you only need to come to meetings and become involved.

If you wish to become a formal member of the Mindfulness Community of Milwaukee, you may be proposed for membership by a member and be voted in at a quarterly meeting. To become a member of the Community, you need only to express your willingness to participate as a member: You do not need to make any promises, pledges, or donate any money.

If you wish to formally become a Buddhist, this can be done at a quarterly retreat of the regional sanghas. At this time, the new member announces:

I take refuge in the Buddha,
I take refuge in the Dharma,
I take refuge in the Sangha.

At this time, one may also take the five mindfulness trainings, which set out the principles for a happy life. The five trainings are read and discussed at our weekly sangha meetings on the fourth Sunday of each month.

Many of our members are vegetarians and vegans out of respect for life and understanding of the damage to the environment from raising animals for meat. This is not, however, a requirement and other members eat meat as an important part of their diet. We ask that all food served or brought to the sangha should be vegan (no animal products) or vegetarian (milk or eggs may be included, but no meat, poultry, fish, etc.).

Alcoholic beverages and other intoxicants should not be brought into the sangha. Mindfulness cannot be improved when one's mind is clouded by chemicals.

Meditation is the means which we use to clear our minds and become more aware of the universe and our role in it. Information and introduction to the practices of meditation are available at the sangha.

About Thich Nhat Hanh

Thich Nhat Hanh is a Vietnamese Buddhist monk. Born in 1926, he worked for peace in Vietnam during the French and then the American war. Working outside the monasteries, he helped found the "engaged Buddhism" movement, which worked to alleviate suffering in the daily lives of the people while working toward inward transformation. He worked with others to rebuild bombed villages and to create organizations to help and empower the people of Vietnam.

In 1966, after a peace mission outside Vietnam, he was forbidden to return because he had so angered both sides in the war that his life was endangered. He continues to work toward peace and transformation in the world. More information may be found at www.plumvillage.org.

Important Buddhist concepts (very briefly)

Siddhartha Gautama was born into wealthy Indian family 2600 years ago. As a young man witnessing sickness, old age and death, he became disillusioned with his privileged life. After instruction from many teachers, he sat patiently in meditation until he awakened to the highest understanding of human suffering and its causes. For rest of his life, the Buddha ("awakened one") taught his path to women and men; commoners and kings; farmers, merchants, monks and nuns.

Buddhism has spread around the world, adapting the practices to each culture, while based on the principles discovered by the Buddha.

The Buddha taught Four Noble Truths:

1. Suffering exists and affects us all. Suffering means not only disease, hunger and oppression. It also means the loss, worry, regret, and anxiety of everyday life
2. Suffering arises from specific causes. The chief cause is thirst and craving for things we want, but that are impermanent and unstable. Suffering results because our desires will never be satisfied by things that constantly change.
3. Suffering can be overcome. If we let go of craving, then we awaken to the perfection and beauty of the present moment.

4. There is a path to overcome suffering.

Zen Buddhism highlights especially the importance of mindfulness as necessary to decrease suffering and realize enlightenment.

Karma is the effect that one's actions have on one's mind and soul. It is a law of the universe: Bad or ignorant intent and actions increase suffering and the suffering of others. Good intent and actions decrease one's suffering and the suffering of others, leading toward enlightenment.

The Buddha taught very little on the afterlife, as he realized that it had little effect on how one lived a good life on earth. However, the area in which Buddhism developed has a long history of belief in reincarnation. In our tradition, we use it as a metaphor for personal growth and change.

The Buddha is not an analogue of the biblical god, Jesus, or prophets.

From Thich Nhat Hanh's writings

Enlightenment, peace, and joy will not be granted by someone else. The well is within us, and if we dig deeply in the present moment, the water will spring forth. We must go back to the present moment in order to be really alive. -*Peace is Every Step*. 1992. Bantam. P. 41

The root-word "budh" means to wake up, to know, to understand; and he or she who wakes up and understands is called a Buddha. It is as simple as that. The capacity to wake up, to understand, and to love is called Buddha nature. When Buddhists say, "I take refuge in the Buddha," they are expressing trust in their own capacity of understanding, of becoming awake. The Chinese and the Vietnamese say, "I go back and rely on the Buddha in me." Adding "in me" makes it very clear that you yourself are the Buddha.

In Buddhism, there are three gems: Buddha, the awakened one; Dharma, the way of understanding and loving; and Sangha, the community that lives in harmony and awareness. The three are interrelated, and at times it is hard to distinguish one from another. In everyone there is the capacity to wake up, to understand, and to love. So in ourselves we find

Buddha, and we also find Dharma and Sangha. - *Being Peace*. 1987, 1996. Parallax Press. Pp. 14-15

Every morning, when we wake up, we have twenty-four brand new hours to live. What a precious gift! We have the capacity to live in a way that these twenty-four hours will bring peace, joy, and happiness to ourselves and others.

Peace is present right here and now, in ourselves, and in everything we do and see. The question is whether or not we are in touch with it. We don't have to travel far away to enjoy the blue sky. We don't have to leave our city or even our neighborhood to enjoy the eyes of a beautiful child. Even the air we breathe can be a source of joy.

We can smile, breathe, walk, and eat our meals in a way that allows us to be in touch with the abundance of happiness that is available. We are very good at preparing to live, but not very good at living. We know how to sacrifice ten years for a diploma, and we are willing to work very hard to get a job, a car, a house, and so on. But we have difficulty remembering that we are alive in the present moment, the only moment there is for us to be alive. Every breath we take, every step we make, can be filled with peace, joy, and serenity. We need only to be awake, alive in the present moment. - *Peace is Every Step*. 1992. Bantam. P. 5

The aim of Zen Buddhism is a clear vision of reality, seeing things as they are, and that is acquired by the power of concentration. This clear vision is enlightenment. Enlightenment is always enlightenment about something. It is not abstract. - *Zen Keys*. 1995. Doubleday. P. 27.

I remember a short conversation between the Buddha and a philosopher of his time.

"I have heard that Buddhism is a doctrine of enlightenment. What is your method? What do you practice every day?"

"We walk, we eat, we wash ourselves, we sit down..."

"What is so special about that? Everyone walks, eats, washes, sits down..."

"Sir, when we walk, we are aware that we are walking; when we eat, we are aware that we are eating...When others walk, eat, wash, or sit down, they are generally not aware of what they are doing."

In Buddhism, mindfulness is the key. Mindfulness is the energy that sheds light on all things and all activities, producing the power of

concentration, bringing forth deep insight and awakening. Mindfulness is at the base of all Buddhist practice. -*Zen Keys*. 1995. Doubleday. Pp. 25-26.

General Schedule

General Practice: Sunday Mornings:

10:00: Sitting and walking meditation

11:00: Dharma lesson and discussion

1st Sundays: Pot luck luncheon after dharma lesson

2nd Sundays:

9:15: Free drop-in meditation instruction

3rd Sundays:

10:00-12:00 Hermit's Well program for children

5th Sundays:

10:00-12:00: Tea ceremony and mindful cleaning

Business meetings: 1st Sundays: Jan, Apr, Jul, Oct

Wednesdays:

7:00-8:30 pm: Meditation, readings, discussion

1st & 3rd Wednesdays:

6:-6:45 pm: Free drop-in meditation instruction

Weekday mornings:

6:30-7:00 am: Sitting and walking meditation

Thursday mornings:

7:30-9:00 am: Spirit-Mind-Body Study Group of Columbia/St. Mary's. All are welcome

Yoga sessions: Info available at Center.

Classes are offered on a variety of topics. There are also local and regional days of mindfulness, and other events, including meetings with other local sanghas.

Contact us for more information.