

# The Great Western Vehicle (Mahaparacakkayana)

## Fall GWV Charismatic Meditation Teacher Training Retreat

Altoona, Pennsylvania, October 16 to 27, 2006



Ernest, Jhananda and Tess

### Monday 10-16-06

Ernest and I meditated together for an hour in the morning and had an hour discussion about meditation and philosophy, then he drove us to visit a friend of his who lives on a farm in nearby Holidaysberg. Betsy is a locally celebrated vegetarian chef, baker and base player. She made us oatmeal, then the two of them performed a few blues spiritualist pieces for me.

After their performance we went for a long hike at a nearby state park where I discovered Betsy is also a horticulturist specializing in native species. At the state park she showed us black walnuts, which were all over the ground under the trees, so I foraged a grocery bag full of them. She also told me about “chicken of the forest” which is a polyporous mushroom that I had read about, but not seen. Unfortunately it had been a dry summer, so we only saw a few dried specimens left from the previous year.

Upon our return from hiking Betsy cooked us a delicious dinner. Betsy has six cats and I am mildly allergic to cats, so by the time dinner was eaten I found my body going through an allergic reaction, so Ernest and I returned to his home in Altoona.

We meditated before retiring. Ernest has one cat, which had not been bothering me too much, but with exposure to Betsy's 6 cats this body was still having a reaction, so Ernest and I went for a long walk before bed. Upon our return I made an herb tea for asthma, called "Breath Easy." The tea helped me to rest for the night.

## **Tuesday 10-17-06**

I became aware of the body around 4 AM, and I found the body was breathing freely. I sat up and meditated for an hour, then I lay down until after dawn.

At 9 AM a friend from Ernest's childhood, Mark, came by. It turned out Mark had developed some charisms from listening to a stop smoking CD that took him through a progressive relaxation. He has since taken up the spiritual life within a traditional Catholic context. We had a conversation for about an hour on charisms and the contemplative life, then we meditated together for 20 minutes.



Betsy Cardiff



Ernest, Jhananda and Mark

## **Wednesday 10-18-06**

This evening Ernest took me to a charismatic prayer meeting at the Catholic Cathedral. It was most interesting. There we joined in with people singing Christian devotional songs, during which people were welcome to express exuberant devotion.

After the singing we were invited to participate in a charismatic healing. I did not know what to expect, but since I was invited up, I walked up to one of two groups of three people. One person stood behind me, and one person on each side. The person on the right was a very short woman who prayed rapidly in a quiet voice into my right ear.

“Praise Jesus who loves you...”

I was not sure what to do, so I entered into meditative absorption and found myself rocking back and forth on my feet. This went on for about 15 minutes and I got the impression that the woman speaking the prayer was cycling through a sequence and that something was expected of me. After a while I opened my eyes and thanked them for the charismatic healing and sat down to watch.

The next person up was a very tall athletic woman who wore high heels. After a few minutes of the prayer she fainted straight backwards into the waiting arms of the person behind her and on her left. Her assistance let her limp body down slowly to the floor where she lay motionless for several minutes in their care. Eventually she got up and nodded her thanks to them, and returned to her seat. I saw others also faint backwards, so I realize that when I was being “healed” they were expecting me to faint. I have heard the Charismatic Christians call this fainting being “slain by the Holy Spirit.” From some few details I gleaned from conversations it appears the experience for the subject is very much like the classic kundalini rush of energy up the spine. However, there seems to be a definite avoidance of discussing the individual experience. I also noticed that some of the people in trance spoke out in nonsensical language, which I understood as “speaking in tongues.” This speaking in tongues seems to be the speech equivalent of spontaneous movement, which in a Hindu and Buddhist context is called a kriya.

After the meeting I had a conversation with the woman who conducted the prayer over me. It turned out she was also interested in Buddhism and meditation; however, in our conversation the term ‘Buddhism’ was definitely voiced in a whisper. She invited us to carpool with her to a Carmelite Monastery, where there would be a weekend Centering Prayer retreat. Centering Prayer is what the

practice of meditation is now called within Catholicism. It is my understanding the origins of Centering Prayer are in Insight Meditation, which has its origins in Vipassana meditation and Theravadan Buddhism.

Another person at the Charismatic Prayer meeting expressed an interested in using her 13-bedroom farmhouse for retreats; however, I was not sure if she was interested in the Buddhist angle or the charismatic prayer or both. It does look like some growth could occur in Altoona if Ecstatic Buddhism could join with the charismatic prayer movement there.



Jhananda at the Friday lecture

#### **Thursday 10-19-06**

This morning Betsy invited us over to retreat for the night in her quiet farmhouse. For dinner she fed us one of her vegetarian feasts. By the end of dinner I was already beginning to have asthma. Ernest wanted to take me back to his home in Altoona.

I said, “Oh I’ll be fine if I sleep in the car.”

He said, “No way! I’ll take you back.”

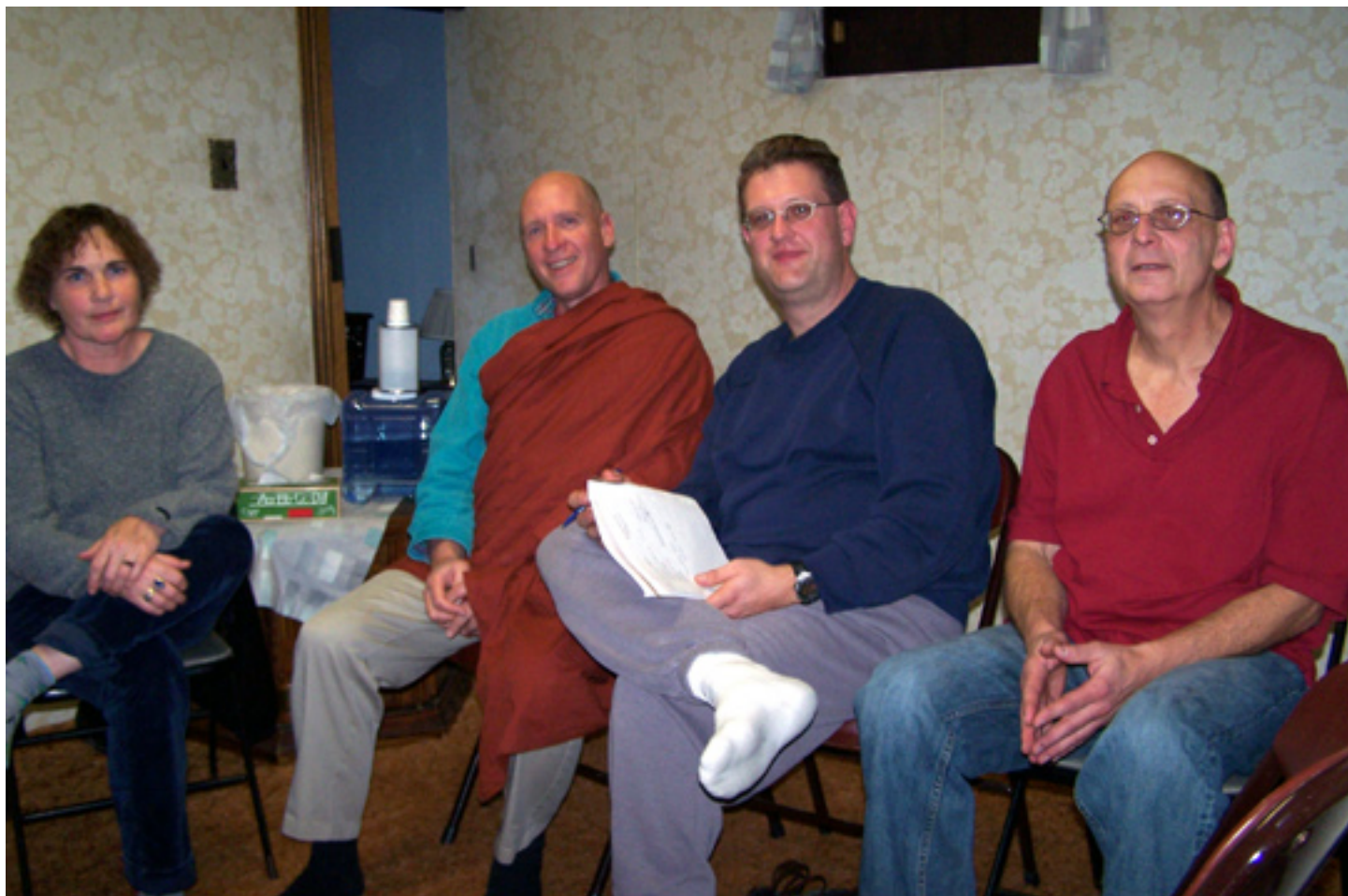
I said, “Oh I’ll be alright. I live in a van, and I am enjoying the fresh air and quiet here.”

He relented and we all went off to our respective places to sleep after meditation. Not long after I had made myself comfortable in the back of the car I found I had worse asthma in his car than I did in Betsy's house. I would have just left the door open, however, it was a rainy night. I ended up taking refuge on Betsy's spacious front porch and rested on one of her wicker couches. Occasionally I took walks along the country road out front.

We had a lively conversation following the presentation. Betsy came and photographed the group. I found out she is also quite the photographer.

**Saturday 10-21-06**

Around 4 PM a friend of the GWV, David Whitehouse, arrived. He had driven from New York. He is a computer science major at university and he brought a blood oxygen



Betsy, Jhananda, Mark and Ken

The van has given me the freedom to travel and make myself comfortable wherever I go, but with gas prices so high these days driving here would have been far more expensive than flying.

**Friday 10-20-06**

Tonight Ernest scheduled a public talk at his home. Several people came to the talk. It was titled "Charismatic Meditation, where the Buddha meets Teresa of Avila."

and blood pressure monitor with him to see if those vital signs changed significantly in this body during meditation.

Ernest took the three of us for a hike at a state park. We hiked and conversed about meditation, charismatic phenomena and research on meditation. Afterwards we all had dinner together, all of the while in conversation about meditation and charismatic phenomena.

David invited me to spend the night in his hotel room, where I might sleep better without cat dander. He also wanted to test me while I meditated. We conducted tests over two roughly ½ hour meditations. In both cases there was no significant shift in my blood pressure or blood oxygen during meditation.

We neglected to bring a blanket from Ernest's house, and we found the hotel room was not equipped with extra blankets, so I took the innermost curtain down off the window and rolled up in it and rested well on the floor for the night.

drove to Betsy's farmhouse, where she was hosting her monthly new moon vegetarian potluck.

Betsy had asked me to give a talk at the potluck, so I gave a short presentation on the value of a vegetarian diet in the contemplative life. Several people came for the potluck and lecture, which made the following dialog most interesting. We had a 20-minute meditation before the talk in which David monitored my blood O2 and blood pressure. Betsy happened to have a blood pressure and pulse monitor, so he hooked up both devices and



Ernest, Jhananda and Dave

### **Sunday 10-22-06**

I became aware of the body around 4:30 AM and sat up to meditate until 6 AM, when David got up. After we had breakfast we drove back to Ernest's house where we all meditated for an hour. After meditation we

took measurements during the meditation. The results were a bit surprising that my pulse and blood pressure steadily rose during the meditation, which was counter intuitive; however, considering that this body is allergic to cats and prior to noticeable allergic

reactions typically the body will exhibit increased pulse rate and blood pressure increases.

The vegetarian feast following the meditation and lecture was superb.

### **Monday 10-23-06**

This afternoon my friends here took me on a walk on the “rails-to-trails” system, which is a biking and hiking trail system that was built over an old abandoned rail-bed that follows an old canal. It was quite beautiful walking under the many colored leaves of deciduous trees in their fall colors. It snowed on us as we were walking. It was the first snow of the season.

During the evening a couple came by for a consultation. They live in the country on the edge of a state park. They have offered their home for a retreat next summer. So, we will see how that works out.

### **Wednesday 10-25-06**

After the morning meditation Ernest and I conducted a close reading of the Anapanasati Sutta (MN 118) “Mindfulness of the breath”

This evening Ernest and I drove to the Cathedral for the Wednesday evening charismatic prayer and healing meeting. Ernest’s friend Mark was there. After about a half hour of group singing of Christian hymns we moved onto assisted prayer healings, which were accompanied by slayings in the spirit and speaking in tongues. Mark stood up for a healing. I did not. I sat in meditation, then I joined the circle afterwards.

### **Thursday 10-26-06**

After the morning meditation Ernest and I conducted a close reading of the Satipatthana Sutta (MN 10) “the Four Paths of Mindfulness”



Betsy, Jhananda and Tess

Around 4 PM Bets came by with her daughter and we all drove into a low mountain in the west side of Altoona where we hiked to a large granite formation that they called "Electric Rocks." The formation is highly eroded granite with ferns, mosses, bushes and trees growing in its many crevices.

On the way back Betsy recognized an edible berry called "tea berry" which bore bright red pea-sized berries on a low shrub of glossy green leaves. We sampled the berries, which tasted like Bazooka bubble gum, which was a gum I was fond of as a child.

### **Friday 10-27-06**

After the morning meditation Ernest and I conducted a close reading of the Kayagata-sati Sutta (MN 119) "Mindfulness of the Body"

This afternoon we drove to Betsy's house where Betsy gave me a going away vegetarian feast. There we also conducted a close reading of the Maha-satipatthana Sutta (DN 22), "Larger Discourse on the Four Paths of Mindfulness" updated 10-27-04



Jhananda at the Monday night lecture



Subject: Altoona Retreat  
Date: Friday, October 27, 2006 9:37 AM  
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Conversation: Altoona Retreat

Charismatic Meditation Retreat: Oct 15-28, 2006 in Altoona, PA

Report by D. Ernest Wachter (YTHU)

After the Culpepper, VA retreat I invited Jhananda to come back to my home to continue the retreat and give me more advanced meditation teacher training. It was a much more comfortable atmosphere (soft beds, heated house, bath/shower, laundry machines, etc.) but also much more distracting than being in the wilderness. Although I took off from my work, I still had to do household duties throughout the day and run various errands, plus there were city traffic noises to deal with during meditation sessions at my home. Also, Jhananda is allergic to cats, and there is one cat at my home and 6 cats at Betsy's (where some of our time was spent during this retreat). Unfortunately, Jhananda had one bad allergy attack and several mild attacks during this retreat.

I really learned a great deal about the genuine Dhamma from this extended retreat time and sincerely enjoyed having Jhananda around to meditate with and instruct me. I so very much appreciate him for his commitment to lifting the Dhamma wheel out of the mud and for the personal attention he showed in mentoring me to be a Charismatic Meditation Teacher.

We also had the chance to spend time brainstorming lots of ideas for promoting the GWV, which I hope we are able to follow through on. These include: forming a traveling charismatic caravan of spiritual entertainment and education, creating a Charismatic Union which would be an



ecumenical association of charismatics and a professional certification organization for charismatic prayer and meditation teacher, music ministers, spiritual directors, etc., publishing many more articles on the GWV website, and acquiring grants to fund the GWV, to name a few. Here is a brief overview of some of the group events Jhananda engaged in during this time in Altoona, PA.

Oct 17th: Jhananda led a dhamma instruction and dialog session and a meditation session with myself and one other person (Mark). Interestingly we determined that Mark's newfound interest in spirituality emerged after he had been engaging in a daily stop smoking meditation with an audio tape for several months.

Oct 18th: Jhananda & I attended a local Catholic Charismatic Prayer and Healing Group which meets weekly in my area.

Oct. 20th: Jhananda presented a lecture entitled "Ecstatic Buddhism: Where Buddhism meets the mysticism of Teresa of Avila". There were 4 participants (myself, Ken, Mark, Betsy)

Oct 21st: Jhananda instructed and dialoged with myself and Dave on the subject of Samadhi.

Oct 22nd: Jhananda presented a lecture and dialog session on "Vegetarianism and Spiritual Awakening" at the New Moon Vegetarians monthly potluck dinner.

Oct. 23rd: In the AM Jhananda instructed, dialoged and meditated with myself and Mark. In the PM Jhananda gave a personal interview to an engaged couple (Michael and Barb), followed by a group meditation with them and myself.

Oct 24th: I instructed Jhananda in the Usui Reiki System of Natural Healing and attuned and certified him as a Usui Reiki Master. I will be giving him the study manual for Kundalini

Reiki and we will hopefully begin devising a form of Samadhi Reiki in the near future.

Oct 25th: Jhananda and I attended the local Catholic Charismatic Prayer and Healing Group service again.

Oct 27th: Betsy and Tess hosted a farewell dinner for Jhananda which I also attended.

We took several nature hikes while on this retreat, sometimes just the two of us, sometime with 1 or 2 others. Jhananda enjoys foraging and he found a lot of Black Walnuts and some teaberries on these hikes. We hiked at Canoe Creek State Part three times, Chimney Rocks twice, Electric Rocks once, and West Falls once. I look forward to attending future GWV retreats and encourage any of you considering attending a GWV retreat led by Jhananda to do so. You will learn so much, be greatly inspired, and be in very good company.

Perfect Enlightenment and Complete Liberation is Possible in This Very Lifetime!

