

# The Great Western Vehicle (Mahaparacakkayana)

## Summer GWV Charismatic Meditation Teacher Training Retreat

Gold Hill, Colorado, May 23 to June 1, 2006



### **Tuesday 05-23-06**

Michael and I got up at 5:00 AM their time and moved into the living room to meditate for an hour. After meditation and breakfast, Michael and Karen packed and did some last minute shopping for the retreat, while I continued to work on GWV email. At 2 PM we caravanned up Boulder Creek Road into the nearby mountains to a little mining town called "Gold Hill" there Jeff Combelic hosted

our retreat in his beautifully restored old cabin. Jeff and his wife, Susan, also have a fairly large lot on the edge of town.

We unpacked the cars and situated ourselves in our sleeping areas. I took a rear room, Michael and Karen preferred to camp in their tent on the far end of the lot which adjoined the National Forest and was surrounded by Aspens. Susan, the other regular at this

retreat took a room on the second story. We then all joined in the kitchen to put food away, and make dinner.

After dinner we joined in Jeff's Kiva, which is a semi-subterranean kiva-like structure that we used as a meditation hall. I gave a half-hour dharma talk, which was basically a repeat from Sunday's talk, then we had about a half hour of dialog. My strategy in the sequence of dharma dialogs was to unpack Buddhism as we knew it and to collapse many of the beliefs that are taught, which are contradictory to a practice that leads to meditative absorption.



During this evening's dharma dialog we covered: the first three stages of meditative absorption (jhana/samadhi); the language of gnosis; and understand vitakka and vicāra, We also covered the desired "grip" upon the meditation subject using the dancing and riding metaphors.

**Wednesday 05-24-06**

Our daily schedule was as follows:

nimitta); a description of the fourth stage of meditative absorption (jhana/samadhi); a "road map" from one jhana to the next; Grip on the meditation subject using the dancing and riding metaphors; When to let go of the meditation object; Savoring the signs of absorption (jhana-nimitta); Hypersensitivity and the transitional phase between 2nd and 3rd stage of absorption and the dark night of the soul.

5:00 to 7:00 AM	meditation
7:00 to 8:30	prepare and eat breakfast; clean-up
8:30 to 10:00	morning dhamma talk, questions and answers
10:00 to 12:00	meditation
12:00 to 2:00 PM	prepare and eat lunch (biggest meal of day); clean-up
2:00 to 6:00	meditation
6:00 to 7:30	prepare and eat dinner (lightest meal of day); clean-up
7:30 to 9:00	evening dhamma talk, questions and answers
9:00 to 10:00	meditation

During the morning dharma dialog we covered: Understanding the difference between the contemplative practice (magga) verses the attainment (phala) of gnosis; Understanding mindfulness and concentration; The Four Foundations of the Mindfulness (satipatthana).

**Thursday 05-25-06**

During the morning dharma dialog we covered: The postures of meditation; The ideal disciple has all of the good questions; and Field meditation.

During the evening dharma dialog we covered: Charismatic phenomena (jhana-

During the evening dharma dialog we covered: Anapanasati Sutta (MN 118); Nama-Rupa, abstract verses concrete, neurophysiology, psychophysiology, psycho-soma;

Mindfulness leads to great fruits (Mahaphala) Samaññaphala Sutta (DN 2); Seven Factors of Enlightenment; Satipatthana; Viriya, energy, kundalini-calm and active phases; defining insight (vipassana).

### **Friday 05-26-06**

During the morning dharma dialog we covered: Dark night of the soul, decent into hell; transitional phase from 2nd to 3rd stage of absorption, meditation induced neuroses.

During the evening dharma dialog we covered: Kayagatisati Sutta (MN 119) definition of terms, consciousness, cognition, concentration, absorption, self, verses no-self and non-dualism, hunter-gatherers and shamanism.

### **Saturday 05-27-06**

During the morning dharma dialog we covered: Satipatthana Sutta (MN 110), examining evidence for a two-path verses one-path model.

During the evening dharma dialog we covered: Maha-satipatthana Sutta (DN 22).

### **Sunday 05-28-06**

During the morning dharma dialog we covered: The Buddha's night of enlightenment, Ariyapariyesana Sutta (MN 26.28) and Mahaasaccaka sutta (MN 36).

During the evening dharma dialog we covered: Both-ways liberated (DN 6, MN 70, AN II.30); communion with the angelic order/deva realm; a cross cultural view on the charismatic phenomena of meditative absorption (jhana-nimitta); omniscience; mystic, shaman, Buddha.

### **Monday 05-29-06**

During the morning dharma dialog we covered: Various key quotes from the suttas in support of the jhana construct. After the dialog we took a brief break. Some of the people attending the retreat had been coming and going and had thus missed key points.



Once we were outside the kiva/dharma hall a conflict arose over the differential interpretation of the dhamma that I have taken verses the orthodoxy of three vehicles of Buddhism. After strong words we returned to the dharma hall and meditated together for an hour.

During the evening dharma dialog we covered: Only Michael and I were left because the others had to go to work the next morning, so we had our dharma discussion over dinner, which was informal and pleasant, but deep.

### **Tuesday 05-30-06**

During the morning dharma dialog we covered: Aseka, the five aggregates of one who is beyond training, Samyutta Nikaya Ch 3 Sagathvagga 3 Kosalasamyutta 24 (4) Archer Book 1 with verses page 190; Early Buddhist monastic personal hygiene; An early history of Buddhism and its literature; The oral tradition as a meditation practice; the flaw of insisting upon the meditation object; the apparent despondency of the Buddha in his last days; Advaita satsang circuit; lucid dreams, OOBs and recovery of previous lifetimes.

The evening dharma dialog was canceled because Jeff Combelic had scheduled the kiva for a shamanic group that he has been leading. Michael and I joined in their chanting and prayers.

### Wednesday 05-30-06

During the morning dharma dialog we covered: The Unconditioned (asankhata), understanding cognition in a Buddhist context, Sankhāra and mental projection verses the saturation and permanence of the self arising nature of the phenomena of meditative absorption; noise in the circuit and the spectrum analyzer metaphors.

During the evening dharma dialog we covered: The Deathless, Amata, not losing consciousness during the sleep cycle; misogyny in Buddhism; the apparent despondency of the Buddha in his last days; omniscience.

### Thursday 06-01-06

During the morning dharma dialog we covered: The 8 liberations (attha vimokkha), kundalini, signs of absorption (jhana-nimitta), the jhana “jungle-gym,” volition verses submission.

The retreat ended after the morning meditation. We packed up and were out by noon.

Date: Fri Jun 2, 2006 2:22 pm (PDT)

From: “Michael Hawkins”

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Subject: Meditation Retreat Report

My wife Karen and I recently attended a 6-day Satipatthana meditation retreat in Gold Hill, Colorado, (half an hour’s drive west of Boulder, about 8,300 feet above sea level) -- which, for me, turned into a 10-day retreat, since the teacher, Jeffrey S. Brooks (aka Jhanananda) was kind enough to hang around a few extra days.

The retreat site, on Jeffrey Combelic’s property near the historic Gold Hill Inn, includes a kiva/peace chamber that is part of a worldwide network of such structures, inspired and designed by Joseph “Beautiful Painted Arrow” Rael, who is one of Mr. Combelic’s main spiritual teachers (along with Bhante Gunaratana, a Sri Lankan Buddhist monk considered by some to be the “Dalai Lama of Southeast Asia” and has a monastery in West Virginia).

The kiva is built into the earth on three sides, with a many-windowed entryway, a wood-



burning stove and many photos of spiritual beings who have influenced Mr. Combelic over the years. The chamber itself is round, with massive lodge poles arranged geometrically into a sturdy roof. There are plenty of pillows, blankets, percussion instruments, candles and spiritual implements scattered around the room, making for a quiet, comfortable meditation space that drew me like a magnet into meditative absorption.

We pitched a tent down the hill from the kiva, beside a trail in the forest. Afternoon rain fell on several occasions, going all night this past Monday (May 29), turning to hail on Tuesday afternoon. Temperatures dropped into the 30s a couple of the nights, rising into the 70s and low 80s most days, while the inside of the kiva hovered between 57 and 64 degrees (my meditation clock has a digital thermometer). Others slept inside the main house.

I got in seven to eight hours of meditation each day, including one or two hours' laying down meditation (shivasana) -- a form that is frowned-upon by many Theravadan meditation teachers, but Jeff says is ideal for developing the non-material meditative absorptions.

Jeffrey Brooks' work involves "unpacking" the Pali Sutta Pitaka, otherwise known as the Discourses of the Buddha, which are considered to be a largely intact record of the Buddha's teachings from 2,500 years ago. As a highly skilled contemplative of 33 years, much of that time traversing the leadership structures of various practice-oriented spiritual organizations, Jeffrey brings his subjective meditation experience to the task of correcting translation errors in English renderings of the Discourses. Part of his translation analysis involves comparing the Buddha's Pali descriptions with the Sanskrit of Patanjali in his Yoga Sutras, which offer similar meditation instructions to the Buddha's -- both containing references to deepening states of meditative absorption (Samadhi). Works by certain Christian and

Sufi contemplatives are also consulted, so as to bring more validation to the concept of meditative absorption as a necessary attainment on the way to liberation. He also shows how basic commentarial literature within Theravada Buddhism -- mostly the Visuddhimagga and the Abhidhamma -- has, in his opinion, distorted the Buddha's original, "canonical" teaching to the point of non-recognition. In this way, he has shown a bias against meditative absorption within mainstream Buddhist teaching that goes back to about 200 to 300 years after the Buddha's death. This means, of course, that the meditation model (often called Vipassana or Insight Meditation) propagated by Theravada Buddhism is not what the Buddha actually taught, and it has robbed Buddhism of its early ecstatic component -- a component that the Buddha insisted was essential for becoming enlightened within this very lifetime, and his very definition of the 8<sup>th</sup> fold.

With this as the conceptual backdrop, we practiced mindfulness (Sati) in order to give rise to meditative absorption (Jhana or Samadhi), deepening the experience as the retreat went along. Our group was small -- anywhere from two to six of us in the kiva at any given time -- which produced a sweet intimacy conducive to excellent questions and satisfying answers. In fact, our little gathering contained the seeds of development for a genuine Jhana Sangha in the Boulder/Denver area, with several ideas being shared toward new projects down the road. Jeffrey Combelic is developing a program for hosting more frequent retreats on his property, and he expressed heartfelt appreciation for the work that Jeffrey Brooks is doing. Karen and I emerged with a sense that we've found a solid community of contemplatives that will support our work around meditative absorption, such that I'm confident that more and more of us will be practicing together as time goes on.

Michael Hawkins