

Sae Taw Win II News

Sae Taw Win II Dhamma Foundation 8769 Bower St., Sebastopol, CA 95472 www.saetawwin2.org

From Dr. Thynn's Desk

2009

This year has been full of surprises for our small Dhamma center. Without a lot of planning we were able to organize the temporary Bhikkhu, or monastic, ordination of three American students and a Burmese friend at Dhammananda Vihara in Half Moon Bay. This, in fact, is but one of the several significant, important events that happened this year at our little Center in the North Coast. Some others; on August 9th our western students performed a traditional Burmese play during a Burmese Youth community fundraising concert. That month we also held our annual summer five-day workshop in Daily Life Mindfulness Practice (DLMP) and on September 9th the community celebrated the 10th anniversary of my yogi life and five of my female students commemorated the event by being nine-precept yogis for the day.

Up to this point, over the whole 11-year life of our little Center, we have kept a low profile. It was intentional on my part, as my wish for the Center was that it would grow organically in its own way, at its own rate. But at the same time, over a period of the last six or more years, I have been laying foundation stones in crucial areas.

The most important was in the development and evolution of our teaching programs and intensive workshops for DLMP. I have stayed very focused on creating and crafting these programs instead of traveling and spreading my work far and wide in the U.S. and other parts of the world.

It took nearly five years to craft these programs so that we now have a teaching model that is viable and can be validated and repeated. The results of these programs are becoming evident in the sudden rise in the number of participants in our summer workshop, the

continued interest in our local weekly programs and the success of our outreach program in Mexico taught by Jane Sipe, who has trained with me.

This year we are seeing the fruition of the work of my teachers in training and our office manager Roger Burns, who is the main tech and managerial support for our programs.

The momentum has been silently growing, unseen and unnoticed, since the early 2000's. I have spent uncountable meetings at workshops with my teachers-in-training and Roger has put in many hours translating my teaching diagrams into PowerPoint presentations and other teaching aids.

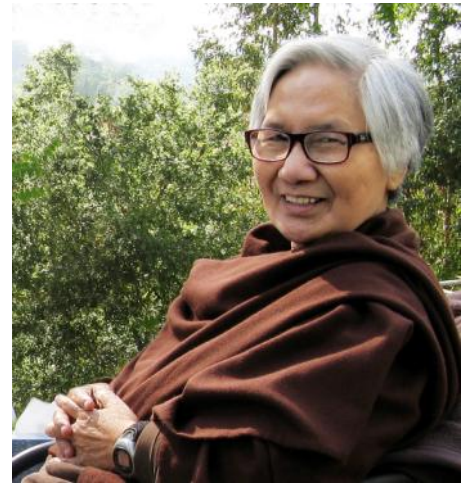
After much trial and error and repeated review and evaluation, we feel the weekly courses and the workshops are fully-fledged programs that can stand on their own.

It was a backbreaking job for Roger especially. In the beginning he sacrificed many hours of his own private time crafting the tech support and continued to manage the workshops and events while keeping the center running smoothly.

Carol Meredith, Jane Sipe and Dr. Luis Kong also pitched in many hours to make the programs work. We all sacrificed a lot of our private time to make our teaching programs run like a well-oiled machine. I cannot thank them enough.

This sudden growth is enormous for a small center with a single full-time office staff member, a teacher/founder who is semi-disabled, and two assistant teachers. Although it is an enormous challenge for the staff, assistant teachers and myself this is the good news.

The bad news is that like every Dhamma center in this U.S. economy, our center is suffering in our fundrais-



Above: Dr. Thynn leads a workshop discussion group.

ing efforts, resulting in a huge deficit this year. Because we cannot afford to hire more office staff, my and my office manager's work has been doubled and we seem to be on a continuous treadmill tackling wave after wave of events almost non-stop; new classes, workshops, participating in local events and distant Burmese community activities, and hosting a stop on an annual bicycle pilgrimage, just to name a few.

At this time I feel an enormous surge of momentum is taking place in the unfolding of things at the Center and in the most surprising ways. I also feel that we couldn't stop this momentum even if we wished to. It is the culmination of the many years of hard work by all of us. It is a mission all of us at the Center feel too important to let fail.

Because of the stalwart commitment of everyone involved with the Center; from the Board of Directors, assistant teachers, teachers in training, students, friends, my own family, and our Bay Area Burmese friends, the Center is still forging full steam ahead.

Highlights of 2009

FEBRUARY



DR. THYNN'S 69TH BIRTHDAY SEAFOOD FEAST:

In February, Dr. Thynn celebrated her 69th Birthday with a Party and Crab Feast held at the Masonic Temple in Sebastopol. Zeke Britton led our volunteer kitchen staff in the creation of the main dish which was enjoyed by all. Other highlights of the evening included a community birthday poem written by the attendees and local artist Eve Decker who performed Dhamma songs for us and even got us to do some sing-along songs with her.

MAY



MUSIC IN MAY FOR BUDDHA'S BIRTHDAY:

This year at our annual Buddha's Birthday Celebration in May we were privileged to have some excellent musicians perform for us.

Above: Rick Heizman and his wife Su Wai, a professional harpist and singer from Burma, introduce us to some beautiful Burmese classical music and song.

Right: Members of The Mighty Chiplings, a local teen bluegrass group, wow the crowd with their talents.



JUNE



SPECIAL GUEST WORKSHOP:

In June, we held a one-day Daily Life Mindfulness Practice workshop for a group of Spirit Rock Meditation Center teacher-trainees. It was one of the most enjoyable workshops we've had, as the group of 17 teacher-trainees was homogenous in their dedicated meditation practice and strong background knowledge of Buddhism. It is a pleasure to expose the DLMP to a seasoned group like this. We are now all looking forward to a three-day sequel of this workshop next year in February.

JULY

We set out to organize an ordination for three of our American students and a Burmese friend at Dhammananda Vihara in Half Moon Bay on the 18th of July. Even though they had never even been to a Burmese monastery before, my three male American students were quite fearless and jumped right into being Buddhist monks for three days.

Their confidence in their own Daily Life Mindfulness Practice bore them well as I witnessed their composure and

poise during the more than an hour long ordination ceremony. They did have some English passages to chant but most of the chants were in the ancient language of Pali and they had to squat on the floor in robes that were very new and strange to them. They did not miss a beat in the three days that they lived and meditated as monks. It was really awesome.

- Dr. Thynn

(See associated story and photos on page 6)

AUGUST

VISIT FROM KHAYAN SAYADAW:

A visit by a Burmese abbot from Burma, whose travel to the U.S. the center had sponsored, was a lively and interesting event for our American students. They had a chance to have a close-quarter discussion with him expressing their interest in the vipassana practice they have been learning at the Center and sharing how it has been bringing peace and balance to their lives.

Right: *Khayan Sayadaw offers a blessing to Denny Petersen, one of our senior students.*



A SUMMER OF EXPANSION:

Since we began our summer five-day workshop three years ago we've averaged six people in attendance. Then suddenly this summer we had about 17 participants sign up. There was a small contingent from Mexico and a few old students, but mostly they were those who found us by word of mouth and on the internet.

Also this summer, for the first time, we took our talents on the road by participating at a fundraising concert by the Burmese Youth Association.

The members of BYA have graciously performed at our events over the years and they've seen our annual children's play of the Buddha's Birth grow significantly better as well. So this year they invited us to participate in their fundraising concert to raise fund to build a Burmese Community Center in the Bay Area.

However, due to logistics and the reticence of our young actors, instead of our regular children's play it morphed into a young adult play including a full-fledged cast, wonderful props and a full set of Burmese professional theatrical costumes.

The play was scripted according to the Burmese cultural line but was very cleverly combined with American street theater props and flavor under the professional direction of Barbara Jeppesen, a student/friend of STW2 who used to own a theatre company. Burmese-style choreography was taught to the mostly American cast by Burmese friends Myat Soe Mun, Su Wai and Kalya. A truly professional flair and finesse was given to the play through superb live Burmese instrumental music provided by the veteran professional husband and wife team of Rick Heizman and Su Wai. And, of course, the fabulous Burmese theatrical costumes of the main characters. Their ease of their acting brought a silent attentiveness to the usually unruly Burmese audience.

One could suppose that it was a big surprise for them to

(AUGUST Continued on page 9)



Above: *August workshop participants practice mindfulness while challenged by the game called, "Helium Stick."*

Highlights of 2009

SEPTEMBER



Above: Dr. Thynn and STW2 manager Roger Burns serve the Venerable Sayadaws that presided over Dr. Thynn's 10th Yogi Day Anniversary on 9.9.09. In the foreground is our friend U Than Htay who volunteered to drive the Sayadaws from the Bay Area.

Right: Yogis for the Day. Dr. Thynn's American students and daughter Win take the nine precepts from the presiding Sayadaws on her 10th Yogi Day Anniversary.

A FULL MONTH:

September was a very busy month for us. The 9th was the 10th anniversary of Dr. Thynn's yogi initiation. It was presided by four Bhikkhus from Burma with American students, family and Burmese medical colleagues; Dr. Than Than Hla and U Aung Myint from Canada and Dr. U Win Maung and Nyo from the UK. Seven female American students participated as one-day Yogis taking nine precepts and observing a day of contemplation and ritual. It was the first of its kind and a watershed development as a Burmese Theravada Center.

We also continued our popular Burmese food service at the local annual Graton Day Festival and hosted the Buddhist Bicycle Pilgrimage for a third year.

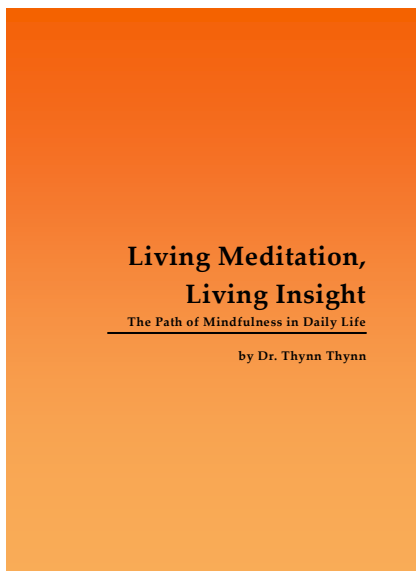


Left: Dr. Thynn gives a demonstration of the Daily Life Mindfulness Practice to some of the 100 riders participating in day one of the 137 mile Buddhist Bicycle Pilgrimage; an annual weekend ride from Spirit Rock Meditation Center, which is to our south, to Abhayagiri Monastery, which is to our north.

PHOTOS: TOM BURNSIDE

PHOTO: ROGER BURNS

DECEMBER



LIVING MEDITATION, LIVING INSIGHT REVISION 3

The U.S. reprint of the third revision of Dr. Thynn's book "Living Meditation, Living Insight" has been completed. It was funded by donors Jain Hein, of Scarsdale, New York, Doctors Tin-Wa and Anna Spielvogel, of San Francisco, and by the donations that have come in with book orders from all over the U.S. and the world.

We are truly grateful to our donors for making it possible to continue reprinting the book which seems to have a life of its own. This is the seventh reprint and altogether over 40,000 copies have been printed and distributed free of charge by ourselves and several Buddhist organizations and private groups stretching from Taiwan and Singapore to Malaysia, New Jersey and New York and Massachusetts. This year we also received a request from a reader in Sweden and one in Indonesia who want to translate it into their respective languages. This will be the fifth and sixth translations into other languages which include, to date; Dutch, German, Vietnamese and Korean.

2010 Calendar of Events -

Next year we will have a full calendar of classes year round, as well as workshops, a fundraising concert, festivals and other community activities.

February 6

Memorial for Shwe Baw Gyun Sayadaw and Dr. Thynn's 70th Birthday celebration, 6-8 pm

February 22 – 24

3-day Workshop for SRMC Teacher-trainees

March 14

Fundraising concert in Daly City, Time TBD

March 27

Quarterly Yogi Day 9am-5pm

April (TBD)

Weekend workshop for Intermediate Students

May (TBD)

Booth at "The Human Race" fundraiser

May 22

Buddha's Birthday Celebration, 3-6pm

June 25 – 28

Temporary Monastic Ordination and Quarterly Yogi Day at Dhammananda Vihara, Half Moon Bay

July 4 (Tentative)

Bay Area Fundraiser with Burmese-born Chinese Calligraphy artist Dr. Stephen Aung from Canada.

August 14 – 18

Five-day Workshop for New and Beginning Students, 8:30a-5p

September 18

Annual Graton Day Celebration, 3p-6p

September 25

Buddhist Bicycle Pilgrimage, 11a-2p

October 10

Festival of Lights, 3p-6p

October 23

Workshop for Senior Students, 9a-5p

December 31

Annual New Year's Eve Gathering and Gift Exchange, 6p-9p

Schedule subject to change.

Please visit our website for updated schedule: www.saetawwin2.org

My Weekend as a Bhikkhu - Jim Wheaton (U Javana)

When I told my family and friends that I was going to shave my head and become a monk, they were all astonished and most asked me "How long will you be gone?" When I replied that it was just for a long weekend I usually got a long stare of disbelief. I have to admit that it sounded odd to me, also. It seemed like a lot of effort for a short time. Most people think if you become a monk, it means years of solitude in a forest monastery. But in the Theravadan tradition it is really not that hard to take the vows of a monk and to put them down shortly after, as long as you are sincere in your intentions, have the support of your family and a local monastery, and agree to follow the Vinaya rules of being a Monk.

My weekend journey started with a Friday evening ceremony where I had my head and face shaved clean. My barbers included helpers from my local Dhamma Center (Sae Taw Win II) as well as my wife of 22 years and my teenage children. I think the change in appearance, especially the loss of my well known facial hair, was the most shocking part to those who knew me. Wearing the white robes of an Anagarika (pre-novice monk) and taking the eight precepts of that stage of "monkhood" was dramatic when seen from the outside. But from the inside, it just felt very cleansing, like being stripped down to the most basic human elemental form that I could be. I was amused by the shadow that was cast onto the ground ahead of me, as I walked to spend the night in the little cabin called a Kutti. The shadowy form on the ground showed my rounded head and ears in all their glory. And it reminded me of all of the countless humans who have gone before me down this path of meditation.

The ceremony held in the monastery the next day involved hurried instructions on how to wear the saffron robes that had been presented to me. I later learned that, for a monk, it is very important to present yourself properly in the robes. It is a position of honor in society and carries with it many obligations to those who are supporting the monks with their basic needs. It is not really a matter of pride or vanity that requires the robes to look proper, but rather an acknowledge-



Above: Dr. Thynn (front) sits for a formal portrait with four newly ordained Bhikkhus (LtoR) Alfred Soe, Denny Petersen, Adam Titone, and Jim Wheaton (the author)

ment that wearing the robes is a great honor, and that those who chose to take the robes, are also choosing to take seriously their inner work toward the correct understanding of our true nature as human beings.

One of the most profound moments was at the very end of the ceremony with the fully ordained monks. We were all sitting cross-legged on the floor, huddled close together so there was a sense of true connection. After answering all of the questions required as part of the ceremony, the Instructor said, very quietly in my ear "O.K. you are now a Bhikkhu." I felt a shiver at that moment and connected with some part of my distant past.

The rest of the weekend was filled with new experiences, including early morning chanting in a language that I did not know (Pali), and instructions on meditation techniques which I had heard before, but which I came to understand at a much deeper level. I found the times of walking meditation to be

(My Weekend... Continued on page 8)



The four anagarikas begin the ceremony to receive their novice ordination, which is followed by ordination as a Bhikkhu.

စေတော်ဝင် (၂) ဓမ္မစခန်း အခေ-ကောင်း သိကောင်းစရာများ။

စေတော်ဝင် (၂) ဓမ္မစခန်းကို ၁၉၉၈ ခုနှစ် နိုဝင်ဘာလ (၁၅) ရက်နေ့ တွင် ကာလီဖိုးနီးယားပြည်နယ်မြောက်ပိုင်းရှိ **Sebastopol/Graton** အရပ်တွင် စတင်တည်ထောင်ခဲ့သည်။

စေတော်ဝင် (၂) ဓမ္မစခန်းကို မြန်မာနိုင်ငံ မလိုင်မြို့ နယ်မှ ရွှေပေါကျွန်းဆရာတော်ဘုရားကြီး၏ မူလစေတော်ဝင် စခန်းကြီး၏ စခန်းခွဲတစ်ခု ဖြစ်သည်နှင့်အညီ ဆရာတော်ဘုရားကြီးချမှတ်ခဲ့သည့် ကျင့်စဉ်များအတိုင်း လိုက်နာကျင့်ကြံလျက် ရှိပါသည်။ ဤဓမ္မစခန်းကို ဦးစီးတည်ထောင်သူမှာ ဒေါက်တာသင်းသင်းဖြစ်ပါသည်။ ၎င်းသည် ၁၉၈၆ ခုနှစ်မှစ၍ ထိုင်းနိုင်ငံ ဘန်ကောက်မြို့ တွင် ဗုဒ္ဓဘာသာ အခြေခံသင်တန်းများ၊ ဝိပဿနာသင်တန်းများကို စာတွေ့ ၊ လက်တွေ့ ပို့ချခဲ့သည်။

၁၉၉၁ ခုနှစ်မှစ၍ အမေရိကန်နိုင်ငံ နယူးယောက်ပြည်နယ်နှင့် ကာလီဖိုးနီးယားပြည်နယ်၊ ကာနေဒါနိုင်ငံ၊ မက္ကဆီကို နိုင်ငံ၊ ဩစတေးလျား နိုင်ငံတို့ တွင် သတိပဋ္ဌိန်တရား၊ တနေ့ တာဘဝ၏ ကျင့်ကြံအားထုတ်နည်းများဖြင့် ပို့ချပေးခဲ့သည်။

ဒေါက်တာသင်းသင်းသည် ၁၉၉၃ခု ၉လ ၉ရက်နေ့ တွင် ရာသက်ပန်ယောဂီ (အနာဂါရိကယောဂီ) အဖြစ်ခံယူ၍ ဗုဒ္ဓဘုရားရှင်၏ သာသနာသုံးရပ် (သမထ၊ ဝိပဿနာကျင့်စဉ်၊ ပရိယတ္တိ) ပြန့်ပွားတည်တန့် ရေးအတွက် အားထုတ်ကြိုးပမ်း လျက် ရှိပါသည်။ ၂၀၀၁ ခုနှစ်တွင် အာနန္ဒာသူရိယ မေတ္တာထွဋ်ခေါင် ကမ္ဘာအေးစေတီတော်ကို စခန်းတွင် တည်ထားပူဇော်၍ ဝေနေယျများ ကုသိုလ်ပါရမီ ပွားနိုင်ကြပါသည်။

ဒေါက်တာသင်းသင်းနှင့်အတူ ကြည်ညိုလေးစားသူများ ဓမ္မစခန်းတွင် နေထိုင်လျက်၊ ဓမ္မစခန်း၏ တိုးတက်ရာ တိုးတက်ကြောင်းများ ဆောင်ရွက်လျက်ရှိပါသည်။

စခန်းတွင် တနှစ်ပတ်လည်လုံး အပတ်စဉ် ဓမ္မသင်တန်းများကို ဒေါက်တာသင်းသင်းကိုယ်တိုင် ပရိယတ္တိ၊ ပတ္တိပတ္တိ နှစ်မျိုးစလုံး ဖိစိစီးစီး သင်ကြားပို့ချလျက်ရှိရာ အမေရိကန်လူမျိုး သင်တန်းသူ သင်တန်းသားများ ၅၀ ခန့် တက်ရောက်လျက် ရှိပါသည်။ အထူးသဖြင့် အင်္ဂလိပ်လို အဘိဓမ္မာသင်တန်းများအား ပတ်ပတ္တိနှင့်တွဲဖက်ကာ နေ့စဉ် တနေ့ တာတခုတွင် အဘိဓမ္မာအခြေခံ၍ သတိပဋ္ဌိန်ကျင့်ကြံရာ များစွာ အကျိုးထိရောက်ကြောင်း သိရပါသည်။

နှစ်စဉ်တရားစခန်းရက်တိုများ - ၂ ကြိမ် ၃ ကြိမ်ပြုလုပ်၍ ရပ်ဝေးမှ တရားဓမ္မလိုက်စားသူများ လာရောက်တက် လျက်ရှိသည်။ **Online** သင်တန်းများလည်းပေးနေရာဝယ် **Canada, Australia, Estonia, India, နှင့် US** အရပ်ရပ်မှ အဝေးရောက် သင်တန်းလည်း ပိုချလျက် ရှိပါသည်။

၂၀၀၉ ခုနှစ် ဇူလိုင်လ(၁၈)ရက်နေ့ တွင် စေတော်ဝင်(၂) ဓမ္မစခန်း၏ ပဌမဦးစွာ ကျင်းပသော ဒုလ္လဘရဟန်းခံပွဲကို ဓမ္မနန္ဒာ ဝိဟာရ (**Half Moon Bay**) **California, USA** တွင်စီကားသိုက်မြိုက်စွာ ကျင်းပခဲ့ပါသည်။

၎င်းဒုလ္လဘ ရဟန်းခံပွဲတွင် ဒေါက်တာသင်းသင်း၏ အမေရိကန်တပည့် (၃) ဦးနှင့် မြန်မာမိတ်ဆွေ (၁) ဦးတို့ ရဟန်းခံ ခဲ့ကြကာ အရှင်ဇေယျသိဒ္ဓိ ဓမ္မဉာဏိက ရွှေပေါကျွန်းဆရာတော်ဘုရားကြီး၏ ကမ္ဘာ့ဗုဒ္ဓသာသနာပြုလုပ်ငန်းအနေနှင့် ပဌမဆုံး အဆင့် အောင်မြင်မှုအနေဖြင့် မှတ်တမ်းတင်အပ်ပါသည်။

ကဆုန်လပြည့်၊ သီတင်းကျွတ်လပြည့်၊ စသော အခါကြီးရက်ကြီးများတွင် စေတော်တွင် မင်္ဂလာသုတိ၊ မေတ္တာသုတိ များ စုပေး၍ ရွတ်ဖတ်ပူဇော်ခြင်း၊ ဆီမီးတထောင် ပန်းမာလတို့ဖြင့် ပူဇော်ခြင်းတို့ ကို အကျွေးအမွှေးများဖြင့် စည်ကားသိုက် မြိုက်စွာ ကျင်းပကြသည်။ ဆိတ်ငြိမ် အေးချမ်းသန့်ရှင်းသော ဤစေတော်ဝင် (၂) ဓမ္မစခန်းကို တခေါက်တခါ ဘုရားဖူးရင်း ကြွရောက်လေ့လာ ကြပါရန် ဓမ္မမိတ်ဆွေများအား မေတ္တာရေ့ ထား၍ လေးစားစွာ ဘိတ်ခေါ်အပ်ပါသည်။



Student Voices

THE PERFECT(IONIST) PRACTICE

I had the insight that the source of my energy for practice came from wanting to do the practice right--actually wanting to do it perfectly. This was a huge turning point for my practice about three years ago when I had the direct insight that the energy I was putting into the practice was underlain by desire and delusion. It was also when I started making my perfectionism a conscious focus of my practice.

About nine months ago I realized that my efforts relative to my perfectionism are paying off. Much of the time now (but certainly not all of the time) I have a gentler and more patient attitude toward myself and my practice. This is allowing me to progress without as many strong judgments about myself or others. - *Cathy Lawrence*

I was giving a teaching in Nevada City some years back and I was asked to explain what "delusion" is. So I asked the audience, "How many of you are perfectionists?" Almost all of them put up their hands.

I asked "Is perfection real?" They all laughed. "That's delusion." I told them.

As I remember, I did not have to explain any further. - *Dr. Thynn*

MY YOGI DAY

A day of being a Yogi gave me more faith in myself and in my practice. Looking back it was a one day retreat from my daily habits. The fact that, afterwards, you must bring the nine precepts home with you until the next morning brought the practice into daily life and really showed me the benefits of this lifestyle/path.

The path is one of great self-discipline, something I have always wished to strengthen in myself. Having two living examples of people who eat, sleep, breath and teach it; Dr. Thynn and visiting monk U Sawbita, made the goal seem achievable.

I had contemplated taking the nine precepts after Dr. Thynn's 10-year yogi anniversary and thought if I was to follow these guidelines in my daily life I would miss out on a lot of life or people would see me as different and would not understand. But after my day of being a yogi I see it much differently. I felt how strong my cravings are for these sensual pleasures that are part of my everyday life and I could understand how these cravings are unwholesome and distract from our practice of being grounded in the moment.

Before my yogi day I thought all these sensual pleasures were what life was made up of to create enjoyment. The thing that changed my mind on this was learning from Dr. Thynn and U Sawbita's example of Dhamma living and hearing

them speak of their enjoyment from it and seeing the enjoyment for myself. Dr. Thynn said, "It is like you are in the world but not of this world." This spoke true to me similar to being a bigger person, a lesson I try to teach the children I look after at the Santa Rosa YMCA. The world throws things at you and expects you to react in a certain way and when you do not it frees you from this world's limitations.

This brings me back to when I was first introduced to Dr. Thynn and the Daily Life Mindfulness Practice. At that time I was attending Junior College where I had a professor who believed that America is full of narcoleptic people who suffer from many different mental disorders such as psychosis. This professor then asked why we believed Buddhism was spreading so rapidly in America. I believe it is because Buddhism works to reverse this narcoleptic thinking that is bred in us at such a young age. It also teaches us to take our ego out of our thoughts and to see the world more rationally as if our value judgments do not exist.

My practice has allowed me to face issues, conditioning, and habits that Kevin Klotz, the ego, could not have seen or even thought of transcending. That is why I said that the yogi day gave me more faith in myself and in my practice.

I feel safe following the Buddha and the Dhamma, and I feel extremely grateful that it has been my Kamma to have been introduced to the lay community of Sae Taw Win II.

- *Kevin Klotz*

(My Weekend... Continued from page 6)

the most powerful. I was able to witness the mind operate at a much slower rate than normal, and was thus able to see deeper into the whole facade that we call our "personality". I still try to make many of those moments of insight fresh in my mind, many months after the retreat.

The retreat was not long enough for much deeper penetration into the Right View of things. And yet, it was an experience which was profound despite its short length. Someone told me that "One day in the robes of a monk, is worth a

hundred years of a normal life". Now, I'm not one to put down a "normal life", but I think that following a deeply reflective path, with centuries of rituals and generations of monks who verify the teachings, is an experience that should be undertaken by all seekers of truth. I am very glad I had the opportunity to try it, both for myself, and for the benefit of all beings.

Take a Knee: A commentary by Dr. Thynn

I have been saving this excerpt of an article from The New Yorker Magazine for a long time and wanted to use it at some point. But I forgot about it as it lay amongst the many files in my PC. I came upon it again as I was looking for some good materials to be included in our current newsletter and thought that its time that I post it.

Out of all the war stories from Iraq this one singular story touched me profoundly. We know that in any kind of war there are valiant soldiers and commanders doing all kinds of heroic acts, sacrificing life and limb. This story has a different sacrifice and I would like you to join me in appreciating it.

“During the early weeks of the Iraq war, the television set in my office was tuned all day to CNN, with the sound muted. On the morning of April 3rd, as the Army and the Marines were closing in on Baghdad, I happened to look up at what appeared to be a disaster in the making. A small unit of American soldiers was walking along a street in Najaf when hundreds of Iraqis poured out of the buildings on either side. Fists waving, throats taut, they pressed in on the Americans, who glanced at one another in terror. I reached for the remote and turned up the sound. The Iraqis were shrieking, frantic with rage. From the way the lens was lurching, the cameraman seemed as frightened as the soldiers. This is it, I thought. A shot will come from somewhere, the Americans will open fire, and the world will witness the My Lai massacre of the Iraq war. At that moment, an American officer stepped through the crowd holding his rifle high over his head with the barrel pointed to the ground. Against the backdrop of the seething crowd, it was a striking gesture—almost Biblical. “Take a knee,” the officer said, impassive behind surfer sunglasses. The soldiers looked at him as if he were crazy. Then, one after another, swaying in their bulky body armor and gear, they knelt before the boiling crowd and pointed their guns at the ground. The Iraqis fell silent, and their anger subsided. The officer ordered his men to withdraw.

It took two months to track down Lieutenant Colonel Chris Hughes, who by then had been rotated home. He called from his father’s house, in Red Oak, Iowa, en route to study at the Army War College, in Pennsylvania. I wanted to know who had taught him to tame a crowd by pointing his rifle muzzle down and having his men kneel. Were those gestures peculiar to Iraq? To Islam? My questions barely made sense to Hughes. In an unassuming, persistent Iowa tone, he assured me that nobody had prepared him for an angry crowd in an Arab country, much less the tribal complexities of Najaf. Army officers learn in a general way to use a helicopter’s rotor wash to drive away a crowd, he explained. Or they fire warning shots. “Problem with that is, the next thing you have to do is shoot them in the chest.” Hughes had been trying that day to get in touch with Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, a delicate task that the Army considered politically crucial. American gunfire would have made it impossible. The Iraqis already felt that the Americans were disrespecting their mosque. The obvious solution, to Hughes, was a gesture of respect. (*Baum, Dan. “Battle Lessons, What the generals don’t know”. New Yorker 17 January 2005*)”

To show respect, as Col Hughes said, takes eating a lot of humble pie. It’s one of those ‘A-ha’ moments of a very creative and profoundly wise man who at that split second of crying out “Take a Knee,” must have transcended his ego simultaneously as he shouted the words and he himself kneeled down. When I read that article four years ago I said to myself “Wow, what a man and what a soldier.”

I remember when I was a college student in Burma in the late 50’s our prescribed English reader was called “She Stoops to Conquer”. I can’t remember the story but the title stayed with me for five decades. The story of Col Hughes reminded me of the title of that book. He did conquer the Iraqis by stooping indeed. I know you will have all kinds of thoughts around this story but for me his action says it’s all about Dhamma.

(AUGUST Continued from page 3)

find American youth playing the beloved Birth story of Prince Siddhartha and getting away with it with such aplomb. It brought applause after applause throughout the play.

A special attraction for the audience were huge street puppets of the dancing Sun and Moon that actually had to be held and played by three adult men each.

Barbara narrated the whole play, as the story unfolded through mime, which seemed to hold the audience mesmerized to a good extent. It was a wonderful fruition of the ardu-

ous work by Barbara and our stage manager, Carol Meredith as well as the illustrious cast. It was one of the best community efforts put forth by our students and Burmese friends. It truly reflected the bicultural nature of our center, a symbiosis of the Burmese religious cultural heritage and American performance arts in a lively fusion that was lovely to witness and possibly the first of its kind.

Dear Students, Friends and Supporters of Sae Taw Win II Dhamma Foundation:

As this year draws to a close and we reflect on our accomplishments, we are gratified by the continuing developments of our small, yet fruitful community. It is through the donations of people like you that we are able to do our work of spreading the practice of Daily Life Mindfulness. With your continuing support we will move forward with ongoing classes and events while adding exciting new activities to our base of operations, always evaluating the results for greatest involvement and effectiveness.

The year has seen greater realization of our teacher-in-training program both at home and abroad. Dr. Thynn spoke to the Dhamma Community in Todos Santos, Mexico, where Jane Sipe (an assistant teacher of STW2) has been teaching the Daily Life Mindfulness Practice (DLMP) to small groups of students for over a year. Roger, our tech and management support for the teaching programs, has created teaching aids to support the teaching effort that are proving very effective. Each weekly course and workshop is a fully developed program that stands on its own. The Teacher Trainees from Spirit Rock Meditation Center in Woodacre, California participated in a one-day instructional workshop here at our Center.

Beyond the ongoing programs and workshops, new opportunities were created for deepening the practice of our students. In July, we organized the temporary ordination of three American students and one Burmese friend at Dhammananda Vihara in Half Moon Bay. In the early fall, on 9.9.09, five female students and Dr. Thynn's daughter, Win Thu Han, marked the tenth anniversary of Dr. Thynn's Yogi initiation by taking the nine precepts for one day as Yogi initiates at the center. These students' commitment to study DLMP on that day deepened their focus on the practice and offered a glimpse of a more profound experience. To honor Dr. Thynn's Yogi journey, we created enormous beauty around our cedi by lighting 999 candles that sparkled in the beautiful evening light. We together performed a metta meditation that meaningfully connected us with those nearby and those far beyond our physical boundaries.

We conducted several weekend and daylong workshops that intensified the learning experience. As always, we celebrated the Buddha's birthday, but this year we participated in a play with American and Burmese youth to raise funds for the Burmese Community in San Francisco.

We have big plans for 2010, including further development of our teachers in training programs, repeating our opportunities for ordination and yogi retreats and marking the 70th birthday of our beloved teacher and founder, Dr. Thynn Thynn. Underlying it all are the ongoing classes for new and senior students that continue to ground the involved participants in the practice of DLMP.

We send you this letter to bring you greetings, but more importantly to remind you that your financial donations are crucial to our efforts. Please take a moment to consider what makes meaningful change in our challenging world. There is no more important development than the growth of the spirit of the human being, the betterment of a person's character. Our center makes such improvements, one person at a time. In the spirit of the season, please donate generously to our efforts. We need your help.

The Fundraising Committee

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